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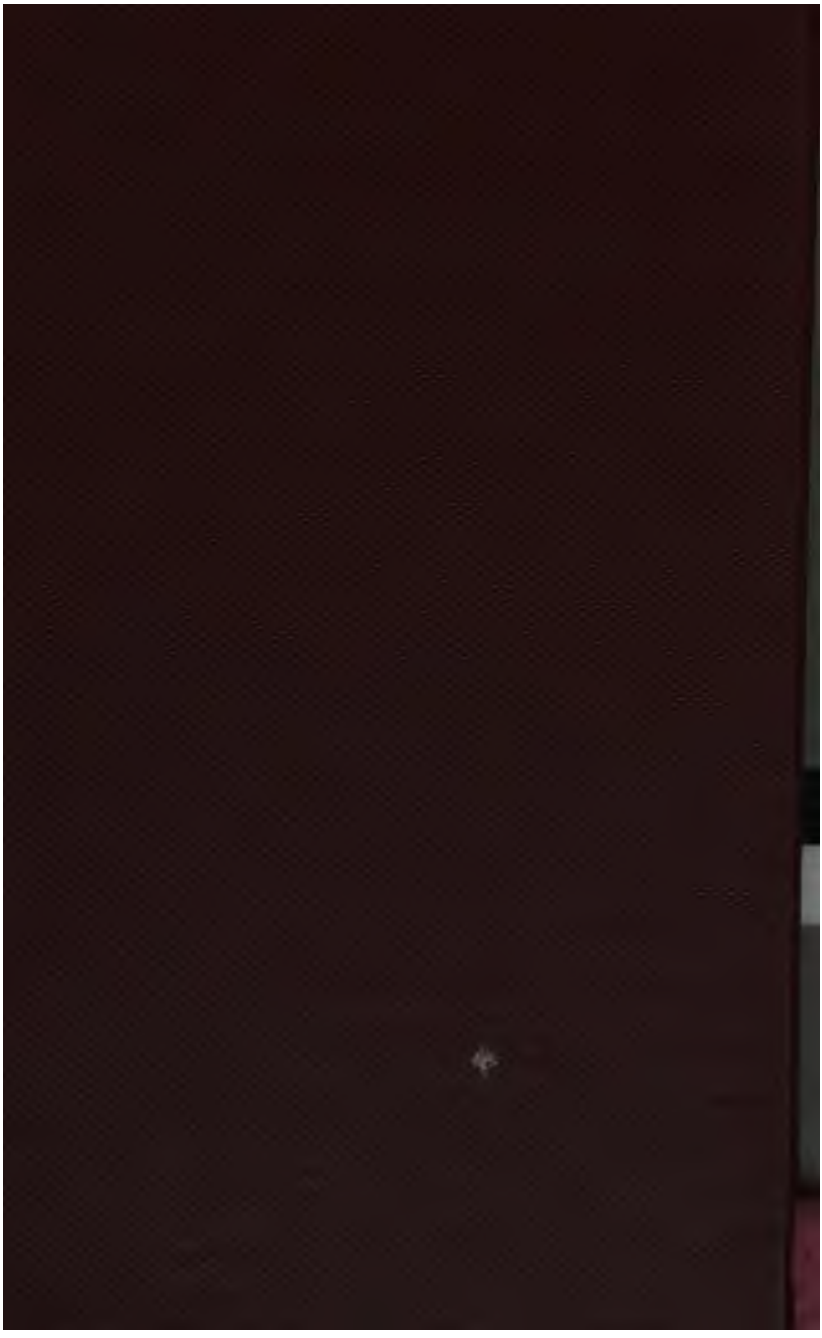

VILLAGE

SERMONS:

DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL.

BY BERNARD WHITMAN.

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CONTENTS.

Sermon.		Page.
I.	Manner of studying the Scriptures	5
II.	Advantages of studying the Scriptures	17
III.	Excuses for neglecting public worship examined	32
IV.	Necessity of doing as well as hearing the word	46
V.	How to make religious impressions productive of good fruits	59
VI.	No escape from the punishment of sin but in reformation	68
VII.	Disobedience inexcusable	81
VIII.	Faults remembered and corrected	92
IX.	Christian Resignation	101
X.	God is Love	123
XI.	Religion the one thing needful	132
XII.	Guilt of seeking riches by sinful means	142
XIII.	Benefit of Afflictions	156
XIV.	Preparation for Death	165
XV.	Character and condition of the righteous	177

XVI. Character and condition of the wicked 188
XVII. Love to enemies - - - - - 199
XVIII. Christ our Teacher - - - - - 215
XIX. The Gospel a safe guide of faith and practice - - - - - - 229
XX. Youth persuaded to become practical Christians - - - - - - 244
XXI. Nature and necessity of holiness - 261
XXII. Christian improvement - - - 277

SERMON I.

MANNER OF STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN V. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

YOUR attention is requested this morning to some remarks on the proper manner of studying the scriptures. You profess to receive the sacred writings, my friends, as the only safe standard of christian belief and practice. You do not consider yourselves answerable to any earthly tribunal for the sentiments you derive from their pages. You must therefore realize the great importance of ascertaining their true meaning. To aid you in the successful discharge of this primary duty, will be the design of my present discourse.

1. If then you would obtain the true meaning of the scriptures, you must search them with earnestness. You must adopt such methods of study, and resort to such means of explanation, and spend so much time in the examination, as will ensure success in your undertaking. Let me illustrate this observation. Suppose then you begin the investigation of the christian religion with the gospel of Matthew. This contains a complete history of the birth and life, the labors and *teachings*, the sufferings and death, the

resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus. Now you will find the sense of this narrative greatly obscured, by being chopped into chapters and verses, without any special regard to the meaning of the writer or the subject of narration. You will therefore pay no attention to these modern divisions of human origin, but read the whole account in its original connexion. And you will compare one passage with another, and one portion with another, until you acquire the clear and consistent meaning of the entire gospel. You will also find different speakers introduced in the history, Jesus and his apostles, the pharisees and sadducees, the scribes and rulers. You will therefore carefully notice the character of those speaking and those addressed; the object and design of their several discourses, and the general tenor of their arguments and illustrations. In this way you will not be likely to mistake the real import of their remarks, reasonings and illustrations; nor to receive for divine truth, the contradictions and observations and quibbles of the ignorant disciple or the prejudiced enemy of the commissioned messiah. You will likewise find some directions which were applicable only to the apostles and first christians; some denunciations which were levelled only against the unbelieving and hypocritical jews, and some prophetic predictions which had their fulfilment in the early ages of the church. You will therefore judiciously separate whatever is of a loca nature and temporary interest, from what is of universal application and permanent value. You will not apply to

yourselves and the present times, what was designed solely for other persons and by gone periods. You will moreover find frequent allusions to the then existing manners, customs, laws, religion, opinions, disputes, prejudices, scenes and circumstances. You will therefore seek for a proper explanation of a these difficulties from various parts of the sacred writings themselves, and especially from some one or more of the numberless commentaries on the scriptures. You will further find some passages either obscured or misrepresented, because our present translation was made by men imperfectly acquainted with the original languages and biblical criticism, and under the influence of party biasses and the restrictions of royal authority. You will therefore compare the common version, with some one or more of those which have since been published, by men of more sacred learning, and of different religious sentiments. In this way you will be enabled to detect the errors of ignorance or prejudice. And finally, you will compare the several gospels with one another. In this process you will find some things related by one writer, which were omitted by others; and even the same transaction described in different style and language. You will find some unimportant discrepancies on nonessential questions among the evangelists; while they exhibit a wonderful harmony on all subjects of vital interest. All this will serve to convince you most satisfactorily that the sacred writers formed no combination to deceive the world, but that their testimony is worthy of all credit and accepta-

tion. You will pursue the same method in relation to the apostolic epistles. You will soon discover that a knowledge of one gospel or one epistle, will greatly facilitate your understanding of the remainder. Your studies will grow more and more interesting and successful. In due time you will acquire an accurate and comprehensive conception of the christian religion. You will come to the conclusion that the sacred writings are consistent with themselves, and that they contain a rational and divine system of faith and morals. And your earnestness in searching them will be manifested by your patient, zealous, untiring perseverance in this commanded duty.

2. If you would obtain the true meaning of the scriptures, you must also search them with honesty. To do this successfully, you will conscientiously endeavor to divest your minds of all the doctrinal impressions of infancy, of the erroneous conceptions of childhood, and of the religious opinions imbibed in riper years from human catechisms and compositions. You will also sincerely endeavor to banish from your hearts all prepossessions in favor or against any particular set of articles, any of the prevailing party sentiments or any class of religionists; and anxiously try to have them as free from the influence of sectarian biasses and established formularies of faith, as though you were ignorant of the numberless divisions of the christian denomination. If you can thus approach the sacred records, uninfluenced by human authority, unbiassed by preconceived systems, *unprejudiced* by party attachments, you will be in a

proper state to receive the truth as it is in Jesus. You will feel prepared to take your seat at the feet of this anointed Saviour, and listen to his instructions with childlike, teachable, humble dispositions. And such perfect and decided honesty will insure your success in this worthy undertaking. But if you go to the scriptures with a determination of making them speak the language of your adopted creed; if you seek only for passages to prove the truth of your favorite opinions; if your slightly pass over those texts which appear to be in opposition to your settled views; if you take verses from their connexion and give them an unwarrantable meaning; if you confine your examination to such sections as appear to favor your sectarian feelings and desires; if you are unwilling to notice the proof texts of your opponents, you discover little or no honesty in your search. For such a course fully evinces that you are determined to embrace no truths which contradict your previously received opinions. This surely is not making the scriptures the standard of your christian faith, but your own will, your party prejudices, your preconceived system, your human creed. All this is grossly dishonest. And what would you expect to gain by such an unfair and degrading process? Is not divine truth of more value than any long established errors? of more value than the favor of any christian sect? of more value even than the affection of the nearest and dearest friends? And could you hope to deceive your omniscient Father, who is psesent with *you at all times*? who sees the secret

decisions of your thoughts and the dishonest counsels of your depravity; and to whom alone you are accountable for your religious sentiments and observances? He that made the eye, shall he not see? He that formed the ear, shall he not hear? He that moulded the heart, shall he not know its hidden workings? Surely. And it is equally sure that no dishonesty can even alter the nature of truth. It is the same yesterday, today and forever. And if you handle the word of God deceitfully, your deceit will not only destroy your peace of mind and self-respect, but will excite the bitter compunctions of an accusing conscience, and rise up to your condemnation in the world to come. Be determined then to search the scriptures with honesty, to sacrifice every erroneous early association, every party prejudice, every dearly prized error on the altar of divine truth.

3. If you would obtain the true meaning of the scriptures, you must likewise search them with boldness. No fear of consequences should deter you from a thorough examination of the sacred records; for there is nothing serious for you to fear in this land of liberty. Perhaps however one may say 'I have received certain doctrines as true, and I fear to search the scriptures boldly, lest they should be proved false!' But is this the disposition which Christ requires in a true disciple? Except ye become as little children, as ready to believe his instructions as children are to receive the teachings of their parents, ye cannot enter the christian school or kingdom of heaven. And *is not all error* pernicious in a greater or less degree?

Is not all truth salutary and productive of more or less good? Have you any interest in cherishing hurtful errors, which must sooner or later be revealed to your souls? Banish then all fear of truth, and search for her as for hidden treasures. Receive her as your best friend and safest companion. And expel from your bosom all error as of earthly origin and deadly influence. Perhaps another may observe, 'I belong to a certain denomination, and I am afraid to search the scriptures fearlessly, lest I should be obliged to leave my present connexion and unite with those I now dislike!' But why this fear? You are answerable to no man, to no body of men, to no sect, to none but God, for your religious sentiments. And no man nor any party of men have any right to injure your feelings or even a hair of your head, on account of any change in your christian belief. Should any one be so abandoned as to attempt any thing of the kind, he would be justly exposed to the censure of the great Head of the church, who is the only lawful master of his own disciples. Neither have you any right to hate any christian denomination. So long as any party adheres to the bible as their only standard of faith and practice, and exhibits a virtuous and pious behavior, it is entitled to the christian name, rights and privileges. Bring then to the test of reason and scripture every opinion which you receive as gospel truth, however sacred, or by whomsoever believed. Perhaps a third may remark. 'I am afraid to search the scriptures with boldness, because I may lose all my religion in re-

nouncing my present sentiments!' I would hope that the religion of no one rests on so slender a foundation as a doubtful or disputed opinion. If so, it is of little worth. No. The fundamental principles of christianity are embraced by all true disciples, and on these their religious characters depend, and not on the peculiarities of any sect or party. You may give up every peculiarity of every christian denomination, and if you have any religion it will still remain undisturbed on the common foundation. Your love to God, to Jesus and to your fellow men; your virtuous, pious, christian character, will sustain no injury by giving up every erroneous principle of your creed. And if these are unshaken, your religion, all the religion worth having, will be perfectly safe. No, my friends, there is no danger in searching the scriptures too boldly. You are interested to know but one thing, the truth as it is in Jesus. You are concerned to fear but one thing, that is error. If you obtain the truth, no matter how many false opinions you lose; no matter how many frowns you encounter; no matter in what denomination it places you; for you are answerable to God only for your faith; and you are therefore bound as in his presence to search his holy word with boldness.

4. If you would obtain the true meaning of the scriptures, you must search them with personal self-application. You must literally make them the guide of your faith and the rule of your conduct. When you find any doctrine plainly revealed, you will *embrace it* as divine truth, and cause it to exert its

proper influence on your hearts and lives. Take the fact of an overruling providence. You should dwell upon this truth, that your heavenly Father orders and permits all the events of this world, and that he designs your best good in all his dispensations, until it renders you habitually virtuous, pious, contented and cheerful. When also you find any duty plainly commanded, you will reduce it to daily practice. Take the exercise of secret prayer. Your constant dependence, your manifold blessings, your aggravated sinfulness, and your numerous unceasing wants, will ever furnish you with materials for your private devotions. And as these are constantly occurring, so let your thoughts arise to your ever present Father, daily and even hourly, until a habit of communion and worship and confidence becomes thoroughly established. When likewise you find any practice plainly condemned, you will forsake and avoid it with all diligence. Take the vice of evil speaking. Seeing how much mischief it produces in society, realizing your own imperfections and failings, and remembering your accountableness for every idle word, you will be induced to keep a guard on your lips. And you will persevere until the habit of self-control is fully acquired. And finally, when you find any motives plainly declared, you will give them all due influence on your feelings and conduct. Take the righteous retributions of eternity. You are solemnly assured that all who are in their graves shall come forth, those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those

who have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation. This simple fact that we are all to be rewarded or punished according to our deeds, should ever dwell upon your minds, influence your whole behavior, and deter you from all iniquity.

Now this is what I mean by searching the scriptures with a practical self-application. This is necessary in no small degree to qualify you for obtaining the true meaning of the sacred writers. An immoral person is no proper judge of divine and spiritual truth. Take one example in illustration of this assertion. You know our Saviour has commanded us to love our enemies, to cherish good will towards those who would injure us, to keep our minds free from all hatred and revenge. Some infidel writers have ridiculed this precept as impracticable and absurd, while their own experience has proved its truth and importance. For while sneering at a principle so rational and so necessary, they have indulged ill-will and inimical feelings towards their fellowmen; and these base passions have destroyed their inward peace and comfort, and rendered them objects of pity and contempt. This remark is also confirmed by the important declaration of our Saviour. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. By applying to your own wants the instructions of revelation, you will soon learn that they are admirably adapted to your condition, your necessities, your circumstances. Be determined then, my friends, to *make* a practical self-application of all the teachings *of the scriptures*; to believe all revealed truth, to

perform all commanded duty, to avoid all forbidden practice, and to realize all declared motives and consolations.

5. If you would obtain the true meaning of the scriptures, you must search them with prayer. When you take them up for perusal, you will raise your thoughts and desires to your ever present Father. You will breathe the thanksgivings of your soul for the unspeakable gift of a divine revelation. You will secretly implore his assistance in ascertaining its true meaning. Will you thank God for the daily comforts which crown your days, and will you not bless him for the words of everlasting life? Will you pray to be delivered from temptation, and will you not seek for deliverance from hurtful and pernicious error? Will you look for divine direction in the performance of your lawful labors, and will you not invoke heavenly guidance in the ways of spiritual truth and duty. And is not this a most suitable subject of prayer? Will not the influence of such devotions be most salutary on your own minds? Will you dare to ask divine aid in searching the scriptures, unless you mean to be in earnest in your undertaking? When you realize that a blessing has been invoked on your labors, will you dare to be dishonest or fearful in your investigations? Will you dare to be disobedient to the truths discovered, and slight them as of little or no consequence? And above all, do you not actually need the influence of your Father's spirit to enlighten your understandings so as to discover wondrous things in the divine revelation? And have you *not encouragement to* expect he will assist in purifying

your hearts from error, and in acquiring a saving knowledge of his holy will? Surely, the inducements to prayer for spiritual light and guidance, are many and powerful.

These imperfect hints will be of no service, my friends, unless reduced to practice. What! will you be in earnest in seeking for riches, and honors, and pleasures? and can you be willing to neglect the pressing wants of the undying soul, to make no provision for its spiritual welfare, and pay no serious regard to the words of your commissioned Saviour? Will you be honest in all your intentions for this world, in all your dealings, in all your labors? and are you willing to practise the grossest dishonesty in searching for the pearl of great price, in striving after eternal treasures, in forming a character for heaven? Will you be bold and fearless in your inquiries after literary, political, scientific knowledge? and are you willing to leave the fair field of revelation for others to explore, and to dictate to you what truths are essential to your salvation, and to denounce you as destitute of the christian character, unless you abide by the result of their investigations? Will you search the scriptures for dispute, for controversy, for victory, for infidelity? and are you willing to make no application of its heavenly instructions to your own wants and necessities? Will you pray for daily bread, and can you neglect to look up for divine illumination on the great discoveries of revelation? O no. You will not be so inconsistent. You will search the scriptures with earnestness, with honesty, with *boldness, with* self-application, with humble prayer.

SERMON II.

ADVANTAGES OF STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN V. 39. SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES.

YOUR attention is requested this afternoon to some remarks on the advantages of studying the scriptures. Very many might be enumerated; but I shall have time to mention and illustrate but four of the most important.

1. You must search the scriptures, if you would become familiar with the most important truths. What truths so important as those which make us acquainted with the nature and character and government of our Creator? What truths so essential as those which teach us our origin and ability and duty and happiness? Such are the leading truths which you find in the records of our revelation. From these sacred writings, you learn that the author of creation is a Spirit, existing in one person, and possessed of every possible perfection. You learn that he is a being of infinite love, the unchangeable Father of his human family, and the fountain of all temporal and spiritual blessings. You learn that he rules the world in perfect wisdom and benevolence,

designing the best good of his dependent children in all his various dispensations, and desirous that all should come to the knowledge and practice of goodness so as to be saved. You learn that he created us for ever increasing and never ending happiness, and that he has so loved us, notwithstanding our sinfulness, as to send his only begotten son to reconcile us to himself, and thus be the instrument of saving us from ignorance, error, sin and death. You learn that Jesus appeared on earth in the fulness of time, that his divine mission was amply confirmed by the miracles which God wrought by him, and that he is now accomplishing the great work of his advent by the influence of his instructions and example and labors and death and resurrection. You learn that he requires of us the possession of certain dispositions, the practice of certain duties, the formation of a certain character, as essential to our reconciliation. You learn that these dispositions and duties and character, are the natural results of fulfilling the relations we sustain towards our heavenly Father, our appointed Saviour and our fellow men. You learn that the fulfilment of our respective obligations is requisite to our present peace and comfort as well as to our future welfare. You learn that this world is not our final home, but that we are destined to a never ending existence beyond the grave. You learn that our happiness both here and hereafter must depend on our moral goodness, that God is no respecter of persons, but accepteth all who fear him *and work* righteousness. So that we have every

motive to a sober, righteous and godly life, in the paternal character of our Creator, in the surpassing love and disinterested sacrifices of our Saviour, in the certainty of rewards and punishments both as concerns this world and the next. And can any truths be so important as these to dependent, suffering, sinful, afflicted, dying mortals? And can you find these truths plainly taught and properly authenticated except in the records of our revelation?

Is it not then truly essential to your real happiness to have your minds familiar with these divine truths? Can you contentedly live in comparative ignorance and neglect of such heavenly instructions? You may indeed for a time, while you are in youth, health or prosperity. But, my friends, be assured that such golden hours will not last forever. The world is full of change, and you are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards; and the only antidote to all the troubles of this transitory life is furnished in the teachings of Jesus. And can you now neglect to secure this precious treasure? Can you now slight that knowledge which you need every day of your existence? Yes; you need the principles of the gospel every hour and minute, to guide you into truth, to succor you in temptation, to influence you in duty, to support you in trial, to console you in affliction, to prepare you for a joyful death and a glorious immortality. And can you prefer the momentary gratifications of your earthly desires to the spiritual and everlasting satisfaction of your undying souls? O no. You must sensibly

feel that the religion of Jesus is of more value to your peace, comfort, usefulness, happiness, than all the world beside. You will surely be induced by its infinite worth to study it with diligence and prayer so as to obtain its true meaning. And you will often repair to it as the only unpolluted fountain of divine knowledge, so as to become familiar with the most important truths.

2. You must search the scriptures, if you would become established in the true principles of the gospel. You well know that the christian world is divided into various and differing denominations; and that almost every one considers its peculiarities as the only true faith and the real fundamentals of christianity. Now what is the principal cause of these unhappy divisions? Ignorance of the scriptures; an unwillingness to receive the words of Jesus as the standard of truth; desire to substitute human interpretations for the true meaning of the sacred writers; an eagerness to acknowledge some fallible master to the shameful neglect of the only proper instructer of christians. Look into the religious world. How many do you find who take their views from their own examination of the sacred records? But precious few. On the contrary how many may be found who receive their doctrinal sentiments from parents and teachers, friends and ministers, the church and the catechism, the creed and the commentary! How many who set up human standards of truth, as the only terms of admission to the christian church, as the only test of piety, as the *only guide to* heaven! Is it in the least strange that

there is no more harmony, union and fellowship? No. All these human idols must be dethroned before Jesus can reign over those who call themselves his followers. All must be willing to receive the plain teachings of revelation as the fundamentals of the gospel. For all that is essential to your salvation, all that is necessary to constitute you a christian, all that is required of you either to believe or practise, is plainly and clearly revealed. If this were not the fact, a heavy charge would rest against the author of christianity; for he professed to give a religion for the poor, the uneducated, the whole of mankind. So that in order to become established in the true principles of the gospel, you must receive the teachings of Jesus in all their purity and simplicity.

But, my friends, even these plain and fundamental truths will never enter your minds by miracle. You can receive them in all their power only by personal examination. You cannot obtain them from other books. For the expositions of every fallible mortal must be more or less tinged with his own imperfections and prejudices and errors. And if you arrive at different conclusions on some points, as you undoubtedly will, still these disputed articles are not the essentials of the gospel; they are not necessary to your christian character or name or hopes. The true principles of our religion are comprised within a small compass, and will be discovered by every faithful searcher of the scriptures, and will lead all who receive and obey them to present and endless

felicity, whatever other speculations they receive or reject.

And, my friends, on subjects of such momentous interest, can you be contented with ignorance or misty and indefinite notions? Can you rest satisfied with the conclusions of other fallible mortals? You are answerable to God for your religious sentiments, and can you willingly neglect the study of his holy word, the fountain of living and saving truth? You wish to obtain the true meaning of the sacred writers, and will you receive for such the interpretations of any prejudiced human guide? Will you forsake the flowing stream, and drink at some stagnant pool? You hear different and opposing sentiments proclaimed as the true faith of the gospel, and will you be forever moved about by the ever varying and conflicting opinions of the world, and have no mind, no settled belief of your own? O no. You will make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the instructions of scripture. For you must perceive that this is a duty you owe yourself, your rational and moral and immortal nature; a duty also which you owe your fellow christians, your Saviour and your God. And in so doing you will obey the injunction of the sacred writers. You will be able to state the nature of your faith and the evidence on which it is founded. You will be qualified to defend your peculiar views and to refute those of your opponents with scriptural and rational arguments. You will be enabled to hear your favorite opinions opposed and denounced, without experiencing either fear or doubt

or alarm. You will be ready to hear opposing sentiments declared, asserted to be essential and defended, without being moved from your steadfastness. For your belief, being recorded in the plain language of Jesus and his apostles, being founded on the teachings of the scriptures themselves, being drawn from the unpolluted fountain of heavenly wisdom by your own exertions, will never fail or desert you. No; not in any period of disputation or persecution or danger. And shall not the desire to become thus firmly established in the true principles of the gospel induce you to search the scriptures even now, while you are blessed with youth, health and opportunity?

3. You must search the scriptures, if you would be secured against the unhappy influence of infidelity. By infidelity I mean a rejection of all special and miraculous revelation. I mean a total unbelief in the divine origin of christianity. Now it appears to me, that every benevolent man, every well wisher to human happiness and improvement, every reflecting mortal, must desire the gospel to be true. For if he understands the religion of Jesus, he must know that it reveals no doctrines but such as are rational, and also productive of enjoyment and consolation to all believers. He must know that it commands no duties but such as are practicable, and also necessary to the true comfort and pleasure of the present life. He must know that it forbids no sins but such as may be avoided at the beginning of temptation, and also fruitful of human wretchedness and degradation. He must also know that those in-

dividuals who live in nearest accordance with the requisitions of the Saviour, are uniformly and undeniably the best and happiest husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbors, patriots and philanthropists. He must know that most of the enlightened nations of the earth are indebted to the gospel, for their civilization and reformation, for their letters and learning, for their good morals and benevolent institutions, for the elevation and purity and influence of woman, and for all their most precious privileges and rights and hopes. And if he is a man of consistency, he would as soon think of attempting to destroy reason itself, because it has led so large a majority of the human family to such superstition error, depravity, and suffering, for so many ages of the world, as he would think of condemning christianity, because it has been sometimes disobeyed and abused to the basest and vilest purposes by some of its misguided and hypocritical friends. But no one can believe without evidence. And there have occasionally appeared moral men who rejected the gospel, because they have heard sentiments proclaimed as the religion of Jesus, which contradicted the clearest dictates of nature and reason and conscience, and which shocked the purest feelings of the bosom, and the best affections of the heart, and the noblest aspirations of the soul. And they have concluded, and in my opinion wisely concluded, that such a system of absurdity and cruelty could not have emanated from the fountain of all wisdom and *love.* And thus without any proper examination of

the scriptures to ascertain if they inculcated such barbarous views of the divine character and government, they improperly arrayed themselves against even the name of christianity.

Here then is one great danger to which you are now exposed. You can hear the most irrational and inhuman doctrines declared to be the religion of Jesus. You can readily obtain the sneering remarks, and false assertions, and sophistical reasonings, and blasphemous declarations of infidel writers. And by the united influence of both causes, your belief and confidence in our divine religion may be destroyed. Your condition will then be most pitiable. Yes. Take from the christian his faith in Jesus and where is he? He is on heathen ground. He has indeed nature, unaided reason, unenlightened conscience, for guides to duty and happiness. He has the same which all heathen nations have enjoyed ever since the origin of idolatry. And what monitors have these proved? Have they led to any good degree of sound morality? or secured any fair proportion of temporal happiness? or given any satisfactory hopes of eternal felicity? Have they been sufficient for the moral welfare of individuals and families and communities? No. None of these high and important objects have been attained under their guidance. Read the page of history for yourselves, and you cannot doubt the truth of my assertion. Take the gospel from him then, and what has he left? Nothing to teach him the paternal character of his Creator, or the acceptable worship of the Supreme Architect,

Nothing to show him the design of his own existence, or assure him of a future life. Nothing to mark out the path of duty, or to induce him to obey even the laws of nature. Nothing to support him in hours of trial, or to console him in seasons of affliction, or give him a triumphant hope in the moment of dissolution. Take the gospel from him, and you rob him of everything most dear and valuable. You leave him nothing for which to live; you hold out nothing for which to die. O, deprive him of everything else; his property, his friends, his health; but take not away his belief in the blessed gospel of Jesus.

Your principal security then against this unhappy influence of infidelity, consists in a saving knowledge of the scriptures themselves. I indeed believe that the evidence, external and internal, prophetic, miraculous and historical, is amply sufficient to convince every candid inquirer, of the divine origin of the gospel. It has so convinced the greatest and best men who have ever lived. It has so convinced every one who has examined the subject with attention and impartiality. The name of the man or the woman cannot be mentioned, who has risen from a fair and thorough investigation of the evidences of christianity, an unbeliever. But, my friends, you have not all the necessary time for such an undertaking. Still your safety may be secured by searching the scriptures for yourselves. For let any man, of common capacities, and ordinary learning, and little leisure, faithfully improve his talents, and acquirements, and opportunities, in studying the instructions of Jesus

and his apostles; let him reduce his knowledge to practice, and become a pious, benevolent, pure and humble christian, and he will be convinced of the heavenly origin of the gospel. He will have the evidence of its truth within him, in the testimony of his own soul and conscience. He will feel its perfect adaptation to his nature and condition and wants, as a dependent, suffering, sinful, dying creature. He will perceive that it is absolutely necessary to make him good, and useful, and happy. And with this evidence from his own mind and experience, you can no more shake his belief in Jesus by the weapons of infidelity, than you can shake the everlasting mountains with such impotent means. And such testimony may every one possess in his own character and heart, who will pursue this process. Will you then neglect so powerful a defence against so threatening and destructive a plague? O no. As you value the precious gospel, in its influence on society, in its influence in the family, in its influence on your own peace and hopes and felicity, you will not slight this only remaining security.

4. You must search the scriptures, if you would pass safely and happily through this world, and enter with joy upon a heavenly inheritance. You well know that we are in a state not only of gladness and prosperity, but also of doubt and temptation, of sin and suffering, of bereavement and death. Now if you understand, and believe, and obey the gospel, you will be prepared for the various changes and trials and enjoyments of your mortal pilgrimage. You

will be enabled to surmount all the obstacles which oppose your progress in the path of duty and improvement and usefulness. You will be qualified to secure pure and rational happiness for every day and every hour of your passage. For in the season of joy, when your temporal gratifications are abundantly multiplied, the voice of heavenly wisdom will admonish you, to use the world as not abusing it, and ever to remember with pleasing gratitude the Author and giver of every good and perfect gift. And in the time of doubt, when you know not the way of righteousness, the language of inspiration will arise in your minds proclaiming, This is the way, walk ye in the path of rectitude. And in the moment of temptation, when you are hesitating between the right and the wrong, the word of God will direct you, as it once did our Saviour, to victory and duty. And in the hour of remorse, when your souls are oppressed with the burden of your iniquities, some gracious invitation of the blessed gospel will occur, and gently draw you to reformation and pardon, and thus impart to your troubled conscience that sweet peace which the world can neither give nor take away. And in the day of suffering, when your health has departed, or your hopes been deceived, or your friends disgraced, or your prospects blasted, the messenger of religion will whisper comfort to your weak and despairing spirits, and assure you that all things rightly improved shall work together for your best temporal and spiritual welfare. And in the period of *bereavement*, when death has taken the friends en-

deared by all the ties of affection, the teachings of the sympathizing Jesus, will convey the message of consolation to your hearts, and direct you to look beyond this transitory scene for permanent felicity, even to those blissful mansions where all the ransomed of the Lord shall again unite in eternal love and friendship. And when the last farewell begins to falter on your own tongues, having been governed by the principles of our Saviour, you can look back with satisfaction upon a well spent life; and having a firm and cheering trust in your ever present Father, and an unshaken confidence in the certainty of a future happy immortality, you can look forward to the promised land with well grounded hopes of endless felicity. All this the religion of Jesus has done for thousands and tens of thousands; for all who have searched the scriptures in the manner described. And all this it will do for all of you who imitate their worthy example.

And, my friends, is not all this the very assistance you daily need? Are you not constantly exposed to the trials either of prosperity or adversity, of doubt or difficulty, of temptation or iniquity, of suffering or sorrow, of affliction or bereavement? And will you neglect this only adequate remedy for all your earthly trials? Will you disregard the instructions of divine wisdom and regulate your course through life by the maxims of a corrupt world, and the suggestions of indolence or avarice or licentious passion? Will you perform those services, and those only, which are popular and fashionable and agreeable

to selfish inclinations? Or worse than this, will you yield to the seductive voice of pleasure, plunge into the vortex of dissipation, and rush madly on to infamy and wretchedness? Will you murmur and repine at the salutary chastisements of a merciful Father? and mourn for your departed relatives as those who have no hope of a happy union after death? and sullenly close your eyes on this earthly scene without any expectation of another conscious existence? There is indeed no other alternative, if you banish the religion of Jesus from your minds and hearts and practice. But no! you cannot thus bring yourselves upon a level with the brutes that perish; you, who feel conscious of possessing rational and immortal souls; you, who have been blessed with a christian education; you, who have witnessed the pure life and happy death of the obedient believer; you, who have beheld the extreme degradation and misery of wilful transgression. O no. The word of life is in your hands. And shall it be, that this book, which contains a religion from the Almighty Ruler of the universe; this book, which cost the only begotten Son of the Most High his heart's blood to publish; this book, which conveys the only clear knowledge of your Father above, and of the only Saviour of our sinful race; this book, which alone makes us acquainted with our nature, and duty, and final destination; this book, which furnishes the only effectual remedy for the doubts, and troubles, and afflictions of time; this book which is the only infallible guide to present and everlasting felicity; shall

it be that this precious, priceless book, may lay on our shelves unopened, unread, unstudied, from day to day, from week to week, from year to year; and that every idle tale, every fictitious story, every political slander, every controversial appeal shall engage our attention and occupy our leisure moments? No. O no. This can never be. I am confident you will all search the scriptures with earnestness, with honesty, with boldness, with self application and with prayer. And I am equally confident, that in this way you will become familiar with the most important truths, established in the true principles of the gospel, secured against the unhappy influence of infidelity, prepared to pass safely and happily through this world and to enter with joy upon a heavenly inheritance.

SERMON III.

EXCUSES FOR NEGLECTING PUBLIC WORSHIP EXAMINED.

HEBREWS X. 25. NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS.

FROM these words I shall take occasion to examine some of the common excuses for neglecting public worship. I would not be severe or unreasonable or uncharitable in my remarks. I well know that many persons are necessarily detained from the house of God on certain days and particular occasions. Ill health, domestic concerns, bad weather and travelling, and a variety of other causes furnish satisfactory excuses.

1. The first excuse which I shall notice is this; the want of proper clothing. This is offered by two different classes of persons. The first are those who are unwilling to appear at church unless they can make as showy an appearance as any in their station. Hence they are frequently detained at home by this ambition. Now is not this a false principle of action? Does it not originate in unbecoming pride? And is it not productive of pernicious consequences? With such vanity, even when

assembled with spiritual worshippers, your thoughts will probably be confined to yourselves. And while thinking of your external appearance, can you receive useful instruction? While securing the applause of your fellow creatures, can you heartily unite in the worship of your Creator? Will the beauty and splendor of your garments render the sacred exercises more acceptable to your Saviour? Do you assemble on the sabbath to display your taste and fashion, to attract notice and excite observation? Or to bow down with reverence and gratitude before the Father of your spirits, who is no respecter of persons, and who judges not according to the outward appearance, but looks on the heart and gives grace to the humble? O let not sinful pride detain any one of you from assembling with those who keep holy time. Think more of the sunday dresses of your souls, and less of the outward adorning of your bodies, when you prepare to enter the house of your heavenly Father.

The other class who make this excuse, are those whom misfortune has reduced from more affluent circumstances. They are indeed deserving of christian sympathy. But, my friends, because infinite wisdom has deprived you of one favor, will you deprive yourselves of greater blessings? Will you let an unsubmissive spirit detain you from the sanctuary for the afflicted? The church is the only place this side the mouldering grave, where the rich and the poor, the learned and ignorant are taught to forget the momentary distinctions of birth

and rank and station and fortune, and to realize their dependence on that all wise Governor, who makes one to differ from another, and who is still the Father of all his family. Here is offered to your acceptance that good portion which can never be taken away. Here you may obtain those spiritual treasures which cannot be corrupted or consumed. Here you may acquire that heavenly love which casts out all fear of man. Here you may secure a title to an inheritance, uncorrupted and undefiled and unfading. Here you are offered an adequate remedy for all your temporal afflictions. And because you have lost some of those things which perish with the using, will you refuse imperishable riches? O forsake not this last resort of disappointed hope. Reject not the invaluable legacy of your risen Saviour. Ever imitate his uniform custom of visiting your Father's house on each returning sabbath. Any apparel which does not attract attention or excite observation, either by its meanness or splendor, is proper for the house of God. And I presume there are none in our religious society who are unable to obtain such raiment; consequently this is not a satisfactory excuse for either class.

2. The second excuse which I shall consider is this; fatigue caused by the labors of the preceding week. I well know there are times and seasons when extra exertions seem necessary. And they doubtless unfit a person for a profitable religious observance of the sabbath. But such periods

seldom occur. And if a person is able to be about, I believe he would suffer no inconvenience from attending church. Nay, I think he would feel much better so to do, than he would to benumb and stupify his faculties by a whole day's idleness and sleep. To prepare himself for the sanctuary; to breathe the pure atmosphere; to meet the joyful countenances of his acquaintances; to unite in the soothing voice of devotion; to have his feelings enlivened by animating music; to have his mind stored with useful reflections, would have a most salutary effect on his spirits. In no other way could he obtain so much real relaxation, receive so much pure enjoyment, and become so well prepared for the labors of the ensuing week. This excuse therefore will seldom apply.

But why should any one wish to disqualify himself by excessive labor for the public worship of God? The sabbath was made for man; for his best interests; for his highest improvements; for his richest happiness. We have rational and immortal souls. These we are to educate for a spiritual world, where our labors, enjoyments, society will be pure and intellectual. And that all might have an opportunity of acquiring these qualifications for felicity, our merciful Father has set apart one seventh part of our time for this most important purpose. And if we faithfully improve this sacred season, in meditating on his works and word, in acquiring a love for his worship and service, in forming christian characters, we shall be prepared, not only

to perform the duties, encounter the temptations, submit to the trials, and enjoy the pleasures of life, but to enjoy the felicity and perform the duties of a heavenly inheritance; and in this way we may make the sabbath answer the end for which it was designed.

But if we neglect to improve this day religiously; if we spend it in sleep, or idleness, or unnecessary business, or improper reading, or unlawful amusements, or sinful dissipation, we become more worldly minded and depraved. We lose our relish for the purer joys of religion. We contract hurtful and dangerous habits. Our influence and respectability are diminished. In times of sickness and bereavement we are deprived of the consolations of the gospel. In some instances we become thoroughly abandoned. And in the hour of death, our past neglect will fill our mind with anguish, and darken our prospect of a blessed immortality. Let this not be the case with any of you. Amidst the follies and trials and vices of the world, do have one day in seven in which you can forget these perishing vanities, and look forward to that everlasting rest which remains for the children of God. You can labor enough for the support of these frail decaying bodies, without encroaching on the season of sacred meditation and worship. Let there never be occasion for you to say that you are too much fatigued to attend on the public worship of your Maker. For such an excuse will not be satisfactory in the court of conscience or heaven.

3. The third excuse which I shall mention is this; a dislike of the preacher. If a minister is uncharitable, and condemns those who conscientiously embrace different religious sentiments, no one can be blamed for leaving his ministrations. Neither can any one be justly censured for changing his place of worship, when he can attend upon religious instructions more congenial to his views and feelings. But it seems altogether unreasonable to forsake the church on account of some slight difference in religious sentiments, or something disagreeable in the style or manner of the preacher. It is perfectly absurd to expect one person so to think on all subjects, and so to appear on all occasion, as to please the differing tastes of a whole congregation. Neither is this at all necessary, could it be done, for spiritual improvement. Our Saviour has no where required a unity of sentiment among his followers. Religious instructions should be dispensed with charity and examined with candor. You are to prove all things by reason and scripture, and to hold fast what you believe to be good. Receive and improve the truth; discover and reject the error. With these rights freely granted, no one can justly complain. And if you would absent yourself from church until you can find a preacher who speculates on all subjects as you do, you will remain absent to all eternity. No two persons, who thought at all, ever thought alike on all subjects, and no two ever will. So that this excuse is both unreasonable and absurd.

4. The fourth and last excuse which I shall examine is this; the want of an inclination. Some

persons are heard to express themselves in the following terms. We pay our proportion for the support of public worship. We molest none in the enjoyment of their religious sentiments. We attend church when we feel disposed. And if we absent ourselves most of the time, it is no one's business. If you were at sea, and observed a vessel fast approaching the fatal rocks, with the captain and crew sound asleep, should you not feel it your duty to awaken the slumberers, and warn them of their danger? Certainly, responds every feeling heart. But, exclaims the awakened seamen, the vessel is our own, the cargo is our own, our lives are our own, and what business had you to disturb our repose? If we please to trust ourselves to the mercy of the winds and waves and rocks, it is no one's business. But, say the benevolent, we performed this act of kindness from the best of motives; solely for your good. And when you realize your danger as sensibly as we do, you will feel truly grateful for your deliverance.

Now this is precisely the answer which obedient christians should give to those who offer this excuse of indisposition for religious exercises. We give you, my friends, this advice and exhortation solely for your happiness. We know as surely as experience and observation can teach us, that by absenting yourselves from christian worship, you deprive yourselves of one of the purest sources of earthly felicity You set an example which you would lament to see followed by your families and friends

and neighbors. You are forming habits which give you no satisfaction, even at the present moment, but which will yield you the most bitter fruits in seasons of trouble and affliction. This we profess to know as certainly as you know that the sleeping mariners were in danger of shipwreck; for these effects have almost invariably followed these causes. And we also believe that by living in impenitence and irreligion, you will not be prepared for heavenly happiness. And shall we not endeavor to awaken you to a sense of your danger? Shall we not strive to induce you to regard your true interest both for time and eternity? And should you be aroused to a regular and hearty performance of your duties, you will soon experience the safety and comfort and happiness of a religious course. In hours of trial you will find support in your christian integrity and purity and hopes. And when your eyes shall be closing on all earthly objects, the last words that shall tremble on your tongues, will be expressions of gratitude for your christian consolations and prospects.

But this is not all. Every person is answerable for his example. And if one may neglect public worship for a slight excuse, then may all, and thus an end would be made to the religious observance of the sabbath. Who then would be the sufferers? Not the clergy alone as some seem to imagine. They are generally persons of sufficient resources to enable them to secure a livelihood in some other employment. The people, the great mass of the

people, would be the principal sufferers. Yes; visit these places in our own country where the sabbath is disregarded, and what do you find the state of society? All who are acquainted with such places know very well that sunday is made a day of business or pleasure or dissipation; that the education of the rising generation is grossly neglected; that poverty is gaining ground; that open immorality is increasing with rapid strides. Take a survey of the world, and you will be convinced that where christian institutions are best supported, there is the most intelligence, goodness, happiness. Should the time ever arrive when our temples of worship shall be demolished or deserted, that time will find us an ignorant, degraded, enslaved people. Let every one then look well to his own example. And, my friends, let me say to you all, never be kept from the house of prayer and instruction by any causes which would not detain you from engagements of business and pursuits of pleasure. Never rely on any excuses which will not satisfy your consciences in seasons of reflection and sorrow; which will utterly fail you in the hour of sickness and death, and which may hereafter rise up to your condemnation. Rely on no excuses but such as you will be willing to offer your heavenly Father in the period of judgment and eternity.

5. Finally, my friends, I would appeal to your own experience on this subject. Can you not secure more substantial improvement and more rational happiness, by a regular attendance upon the religious

services of the sanctuary, than you can by spending the same number of hours in any other manner whatever? Review the whole process, and decide for yourselves. The sunday arrives. You cease from your accustomed labors. Your bodies are rested, your strength renewed and your whole system refreshed and invigorated. You prepare for church. Cleanliness increases your comfort. Different dress produces pleasing sepsations. Worldly anxiety is banished from your thoughts. You then breathe the pure atmosphere of heaven. Your feelings are agreeably excited. Your spirits are enlivened. Moderate exercise improves your health. You enter the house of worship. Tranquillity pervades your soul. You leave behind the tormenting cares of earth. You feel raised above the changing scenes of time. You sensibly realize your destination to a better existence. You understand the real dignity of your immortal nature. You strongly desire to become partakers in the promised everlasting rest from sin and suffering and death, which remains for the faithful and obedient. You observe many cheerful countenances around you. Happy feelings are inspired in your own bosoms. Friendly dispositions are cherished in your hearts. Brotherly love takes possession of your souls. The voice of prayer is heard. You confess your sins to your ever present Father. Vanity, pride and bigotry are repressed. Humility and charity and benevolence are nourished. Resolutions of further amendment and future improvement are formed and strengthened.

Spiritual aid and guidance are earnestly implored. You give thanks for manifold blessings. Your self-dependence and self-confidence and presumption are checked. Your gratitude is enkindled. Your piety is enlarged and rendered more fervent and habitual. You listen to the discourse. The interesting and solemn themes of duty and death and eternity are discussed. Life seems invested with new and infinite value. Goodness and happiness, vice and misery, are seen to be inseparable. In the light of religion the charms of earth lose their attractions. Death is divested of its terrors. It is proved to be a door of entrance to endless glory; the friend of suffering and virtuous humanity, and the wise appointment of a benevolent Deity. And eternity is welcomed as the only satisfactory nourishment for your longings after immortality. You meet and you part, as sinful, dependent, mortal children, in the presence of a holy and impartial Parent. You thus meet and part as equals. And thus you feel your standing in the estimation of reason and religion, which is necessary to excite you to the formation and maintenence of christian characters. And when you return to your homes, you generally find that your spirits have been calmed, cheered, elevated; your social and benevolent feelings aroused, cherished, increased; your hearts opened for the reception of the meek and humble graces of the gospel; your souls instructed and edified. And on the morrow, you go forth into the world, better prepared for resisting its temptations, for performing its du-

ties, for enjoying its pleasures, and for submitting to its trials. You go forth with stronger desires for acquiring and exhibiting virtuous and holy characters. Are not my statements correct? Have you not derived the benefits and improvements and enjoyments described from the exercises of public worship on which you have regularly attended?

On the other hand, my friends, whenever any one of you has spent the sunday in idleness has it not seemed long, tedious, wearisome? Have not your health and feelings and spirits been in a worse condition at evening's close than at morning's dawn? Have you not considered the day as literally lost, so far as anything like improvement or happiness is concerned. And if you have even gone so far as to pass the sacred season in improper employment or sinful dissipation, have you not felt an uneasiness of mind? Have you not experienced the reproaches of conscience? Have you not secretly resolved to reform a practice so hurtful and painful? And were not your characters injured? Were not previous good impressions effaced? Were not former wise resolutions disregarded? Were not your virtuous longings and desires dissipated? Was not your reverence for religion and its divine Author destroyed? And on after reflection, have not disagreeable emotions been awakened in your bosoms? All this you must confess. You must therefore admit that you secure greater benefits and improvements and enjoyments from your regular attendance at church than you do when spending the sunday in any other

manner. This conclusion is confirmed by your observation, your reason, your conscience.

Act then, my friends, according to your rational convictions. Forget not the assembling of yourselves together on every returning sabbath. You will indeed have many temptations to encounter, and many obstacles to overcome. You may see a cloud arising in the west, or a snow-storm gathering in the east. A rain may have made the earth too soft, or a frost may have rendered its surface too hard. A feeling of indolence may possess your souls, or a slight pain seize your tooth or your head. You may have a new book to read, or an old one to review. You may have accounts to post, or hay to secure from the weather. Your clothes may be too thick or too thin, too old or too new, too much in fashion or to much out of fashion. You may wish to visit your friends, and you may expect visits from them. You may expect an old preacher or a young beginner, a dull sermonizer or a long prayer, a man too heterodox in sentiment or too orthodox. Or some one of a thousand weak excuses may arise in your minds, and prevent your attendance at the house of worship. But ever remember that you are rational beings, and that your safety and peace and comfort and holiness depend on your manfully resisting such sinful temptations. And also recollect, that you are urged to a regular attendance on public worship by many weighty and solemn motives; by your desire for present happiness; by your suffering and mortal condition; by the example of your chosen master;

and by your anxious wish for heavenly felicity. O yes; for if you cannot contentedly spend three hours a week in religious exercises, how could you possibly spend one hour in heaven, where the worship and service are so much purer and more spiritual? And should you be required to remain a week in the society of pure and holy spirits, how insupportable must be your condition? And should you be compelled to continue a thousand years among the ransomed of the Lord, how inexpressible must be your torment? And should the gates of the celestial paradise be thrown open, how quickly and how joyfully would you flee from the presence of your Saviour and his purified followers? O never forget that you are educating yourselves for another, a better, a spiritual world; and if you cannot here enjoy purity, goodness, devotion, heaven will prove your severest hell.

SERMON IV.

NECESSITY OF DOING AS WELL AS HEARING THE WORD.

JAMES I. 22. BE YE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOUR OWN SELVES.

You will admit, my friends, that christianity is the greatest blessing which our heavenly Father has ever conferred on the human family. You will also acknowledge the vast superiority which christian communities possess over those that are under the influence of false religions, in civil liberty, in social and domestic enjoyment, in mental cultivation and moral purity. You must likewise be sensible, that the inhabitants of this commonwealth are more signally blessed with religious privileges, than any other portion of the christian world. For almost every village is provided with a convenient church and an ordained pastor; almost every family is favored with a bible and the ability to peruse its sacred pages, and to every individual is secured perfect freedom of conscience. And when we observe the respectable numbers who usually attend upon the christian institutions in most of our houses of public worship, we are ready to conclude that

these privileges are properly appreciated and improved. And our conclusion is in a degree confirmed when we witness the cheerful obedience to civil authority, the social intercourse, the domestic comfort, and the correct morals which generally prevail. But upon a more intimate survey of society, we have reason to doubt the correctness of this conclusion. For the distinguishing traits already mentioned are not the peculiar fruits of the gospel. And our doubts are confirmed when we learn that some who attend upon the weekly religious instructions, still continue to live immoral lives; that many more disclaim all pretensions to real piety, and that comparatively few, in an explicit manner and in the prescribed way, confess Christ before men.

It therefore becomes a serious inquiry, why christianity, a religion from heaven, so admirably adapted to our condition and wants, in a land so congenial to its free spirit, produces no more and no better christians?' I do not deny that it confers invaluable blessings on our community. I grant that all our virtues, our kind feelings, our benevolent dispositions, our civil and social and literary and domestic institutions, draw more or less of their nourishment from its fountain; and that conscience is kept so awakened by its repeated admonitions, as to prevent the rapid increase of avarice, sensuality and the baser crimes. These indeed are blessings of great, of incalculable importance. But these alone do not constitute real christians; do not imply that holiness of heart *and life*, that christian spirit and

conduct, that love for God and man which are required of the disciples of Jesus.

Where then rests the blame of the partial and limited influence of the gospel? On christianity itself? Certainly not. For in this system of faith and morals there is no fault, no want of evidence to establish its truth and divine origin, no want of precepts for the regulation of every thought and word and deed, and living witnesses may be produced to testify to its purifying influence on the heart and character. It is such a revelation as God saw proper to bestow upon his dependent children; and any objections urged against the religion will apply with equal force against its divine author. Does the blame rest on the public teachers of the gospel? In some degree no doubt it does. For they are frail, prejudiced mortals like yourselves. And with all their superior advantages for the acquisition of wisdom and goodness, they are still liable to errors, imperfections and sins. But were their plain practical instructions more implicitly and universally followed, there would be less vice and more of the blessed fruits of the gospel. And there can be no doubt that every preacher gives to his hearers manifold more rules for the regulation of every affection and action than are ever followed by the best of christians. If then the blame be not in christianity itself, nor particularly in its public teachers, that so few of its genuine fruits are seen, will it not be found to rest in a great degree on those who hear the gospel *preached?* Are there not many in all our religious

societies who are hearers only and not doers of the word?

1. Is it not a fact, that a portion of almost every christian assembly may be properly denominated inattentive hearers? I mean hearers who are almost wholly inattentive to the religious exercises of the sanctuary. They may exhibit a correct behavior while at church, but their minds for the most part are employed on vain and frivolous and earthly subjects; recalling past transactions, conversing with distant acquaintances, and imagining scenes of future interest and enjoyment; wandering through creation, any where and every where except on those instructions so essential to their soul's best welfare, and on that being for whose worship they have assembled. And if questioned respecting the solemn services, though they may be able to tell you how many interesting fictitious scenes were recalled, how many hours of mirth and gaiety were lived over again, how many plans were invented for securing earthly happiness, increasing wealth and obtaining influence and distinction, yet they can give you but a very imperfect account of the topics of devotion, or the sentiments of discourse, or the instructions of scripture. And thus inattentive do they often continue, sunday after sunday, and even year after year, until some calamity disturbs their spiritual slumbers, and arouses their attention to the all-important concerns of religion.

2. Is it not also a fact, that another part of many congregations may justly be called inconsiderate

hearers? I mean hearers who do not give the subject of religion a serious consideration. They may give proper attention to the duties of the church, and remember much of the instructions. They may delight in commending and communicating the excellences of the performances, and exhibit a deep interest in the prevalence of correct religious views. They may consider religion a very good thing for society in general. But they do not seem to regard its instructions as having any application to themselves in particular, do not acknowledge its claims on their own heart and life, do not realize that each one is accountable for himself to God, who will render unto every man according to his deeds, do not feel themselves any farther interested in the public exercises of the church than to be amused or entertained or pleasantly excited, and thus inconsiderate as they often remain, until some alarming providence turns their thoughts to the momentous concerns of their immortal welfare.

3. Is it not likewise a fact, that another part of some christian societies consists of critical hearers? I mean hearers who assemble at church, not to worship the Parent of the universe, not to hear the important truths of the gospel explained and defended and enforced, not to obtain moral and religious instruction, not to have their good resolutions confirmed, their hearts made better and their whole characters improved; but principally to gratify a love for criticism, to hear fine writing and eloquent speaking, to have the fancy amused and the imagination de-

lighted, to acquire materials for conversation and the display of their colloquial talent. They afterward find sufficient employment in commenting on the various discourses which they have heard. For instance, such a word was too common and such a sentence was not sufficiently rounded, such a part was common place and such a part superfluous, here was an attempt to dash and there was a specimen of the bathos, there a paragraph should have been added and here a particular doctrine introduced, here was a head too liberal in sentiment and there one too orthodox, this reproof was applicable to my friend on the right and that to my neighbor on the left; and in this hypercritical way, they unsettle the minds and excite the prejudices of honest hearers, injure the minister's usefulness, and obtain no benefit to themselves.

4. Is it not further a fact, that another portion of some congregations may be distinguished as prejudiced hearers? I mean hearers who are so strongly prejudiced against those ministers whose voice and manner and style do not suit their taste, that they cannot be benefited by their services? Just as if one man could so think and write and speak and look, as to please the varying fancies of a whole congregation. Or hearers who are so strongly prejudiced against other christian sects, that they cannot be instructed or edified when they happen to suspect the preacher is not of their own party. They are not only so strongly prejudiced, as to incapacitate their minds for any free and impartial ex-

amination, but they are too apt to try the sentiments advanced, not by the infallible standard of truth, but by their own preconceived views, their interpretations of scripture, the unscriptural creeds of their party, and it often seems a matter of little or no consequence with them, whether their party belief can be expressed in scriptural language, or only in terms of human invention; whether it has been drawn unpolluted from the pure fountain of salvation, or received through the muddy channels of some party commentators; whether its natural tendency be to increase exertion and produce holiness of heart and life, or to paralize all human efforts and lull to sleep the guilty conscience. Should the preaching of the heavenly Jesus, his sermon on the mount, nay every sentiment be uttered be tried by some party standards, I fear it would be found wanting. I suspect it would be called moral preaching. It might be called good so far as it went, but it would not go far enough for these prejudiced disciples. It would not contain what they call the great and essential doctrines of grace. What! the instructions of Jesus not contain the essence of the gospel? Would such hearers of all sects listen with more candor, and imitate the noble example of the Bereans, we should not hear so many christians denounced as unconverted and unbelievers.

5. Finally is it not a fact, that some part of almost every congregation may be styled waiting hearers? I mean hearers who are waiting for a more convenient season before they begin the work of reforma-

tion and improvement; or hearers who have unfortunately imbibed the false sentiment that they must wait patiently for the Lord to convert them. Hence they forbear commencing a religious course, lest they should be guilty of taking God's work out of his hands, or for fear they might go about to establish a righteousness of their own. Consequently they are waiting in expectation that God in his own good time will instantaneously work a miraculous change on their hearts. Do such hearers realize that the false and pernicious sentiment on which they are resting the welfare of their immortal souls has no foundation in scripture? That assistance is promised to those and those only who ask, seek, strive? Whilst a tremendous punishment is threatened against those who neglect or misimprove their privileges and talents? Does not observation teach them that religious lives are not ordinarily commenced by a sudden and powerful excitement of mind? And that those who have waited for this excitement, have waited until their doom was sealed by death, and their impenitent souls hastened into the presence of a pure and holy God?

Now, my friends, after deducting the various classes who are hearers only, how large a proportion will remain who are sincerely endeavoring to be doers as well as hearers? How large a number will be left, who take an open and decided stand on christian ground? How many who make religion a serious and constant concern? In short, how many who habitually strive to obey the commands,

imitate the example and exhibit the spirit of Christ Jesus? The number, you will all admit, is not so great as could be wished; is not so great but it may be increased. And one principal reason why it is not greater, as I have attempted to prove, is because so many who hear the word are not doers. Whether there be few or many of this number present, you will permit me to urge upon your attention the apostolic exhortation. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your ownselves.

Yes; if there be any present who are hearers and not doers of the word, suffer me to assure you, that you are deceiving yourselves. Ye are deceiving yourselves in regard to the object and the reward of your attendance on religious instructions. And what are these? Is not the object of attending church to receive assistance in becoming wise and good? And is not the reward of wisdom and goodness, present and future happiness? Should ye not attend then to have all the duties you owe yourselves, your fellow men, your anointed Saviour, your heavenly Father, made plain before you? so that by a faithful discharge of them ye may secure the approbation of your own conscience, the love of the wise and good, and the present and future blessings of your all-perfect Creator. Should ye not attend to have all your transgressions set in array before you? so that by seeing the wickedness of your doings ye may be excited to reform every evil and false way? Should ye not attend to hear of the Saviour Jesus, to hear his wearisome labors described, so

that ye may never become weary in well doing? to hear his example illustrated, so that ye may have a perfect pattern for all your conduct? to hear his sufferings and death proclaimed, so that ye may know the price of your redemption, and thus be moved to penitence and gratitude and obedience? to hear his resurrection declared, so that ye may feel assured of meeting all the ransomed of the Lord in a better world? Should ye not attend to have inspired in your bosom a love and delight in the worship of the most high God, so that when ye leave this world, you may depart in peace and be prepared to unite in the purer worship of the heavenly host? Now if you do not accomplish these objects by your attendance; if you do not increase in wisdom and goodness and happiness, do you not deceive yourselves in regard to the object of your attendance? Do you not lose the reward of your labor? Most certainly.

Not only so. Such deception is the worst of all deceptions. For it is self deception, and for its attendent consequences ye can blame none but yourselves. Can the traveller who disregards proper directions, and follows the suggestion of his own inclinations, justly blame any but himself, should disasters befall him in his wrong but chosen course? And can ye who come up hither to inquire the way to happiness and heaven, justly blame any but yourselves, when your deliberate disobedience to the divine commands and your willing submission to earthborn *propensities,* are attended with pain and

remorse and selfcondemnation? Can the patient who knowingly deviates from the prescriptions of his physician and blindly follows the errors of his own ignorance, justly blame any but himself for the pernicious consequences of his wilful deviations? And can ye who present yourselves here to inquire of Jesus, the great moral physician, what must be done for your soul's salvation, justly blame any but yourselves, if your souls are not saved, so long as ye do not comply with his divine prescriptions? Can the mariner who neglects his compass and chart, justly blame any but himself for the sad calamity of shipwreck? And have you not the gospel, as a compass and chart, to guide you safely to the haven of eternal rest? And if you neglect to consult and follow its unerring directions, can you justly blame any but yourselves, should your hopes of pure and permanent happiness be wrecked on the rocks of sin?

But this is not all. This is not only the worst of all deceptions, but it is deception on the most important of all subjects. What concern so important as the happiness or misery of the never dying soul? And what deception so awful as that which deprives us of present and future felicity? Ye may be deceived for a season in your worldly expectations? But this is comparatively nothing. For time and patience and persevering exertion may produce a remedy. The husbandman may plant and till his ground with the sure expectation of a joyful harvest. The drought may wither, and the mildew blight, and the frost destroy the fruits of the earth, and thus de-

ceive his expectations. But another spring shall return, and another seed time be his, and a more abundant harvest shall spread the veil of forgetfulness over his former disappointment. The merchant may fill his storehouse with goods and expect an increase of wealth from his merchandize. The moth may eat, and the rust corrupt, and the theives steal, and the fire destroy his treasures, and thus deceive his expectations. But industry and economy may supply his losses, and thus his deception find a remedy. But if ye live in expectation of receiving the rewards of the gospel, merely because ye hear the gospel preached, ye are greatly deceived, and for your deception there is no remedy. No, none. For every day of your life which sin renders miserable, is a day gone, never to be recalled, and there is no remedy for past suffering. And when brought upon the bed of death, every regret you feel for past neglect of duty, every sting of conscience you shall experience for sins committed, every fearful forboding of the future which shall harrow up the very secrets of your soul, will be the natural consequences of your irreligious course, the bitter fruit of your selfdeception. And for all this misery there can be no remedy, for your days will be numbered and finished, and no space will remain for reformation. And if you leave this world impure and unreformed, how can you be qualified for the duties and pleasures of heaven? Must not a remembrance of your past ingratitude and disobedience fill your soul with horror *and remorse?* And how can you delight in

the love and worship of that God whom you have never really loved and worshipped while on earth? How can you enter the presence of that Saviour whom you have slighted and neglected, and perhaps crucified afresh by your wicked deeds? And how can you enjoy the society of those pure spirits whose powers are devoted to the honor of their Saviour and their Father? It cannot be. O be not deceived. Remember that he that who *doeth* righteousness is righteous, and he alone. And if any of you have hitherto been hearers only, and not doers of the word, let it be so no longer. Let the recording angel now write the sincere determination of your hearts, that you will endeavor to obey all the christian precepts. And let me tell you, that in keeping of them there is great reward; reward in life, reward in death, reward glorious and immortal in the world to come. Be ye all therefore doers of the world as well as hearers, that ye may be blessed in your deeds.

SERMON V.

HOW TO MAKE RELIGIOUS IMPRESSIONS PRODUCTIVE OF GOOD FRUITS.

HOSEA VI. 4. YOUR GOODNESS IS AS A MORNING CLOUD, AND AS THE EARLY DEW IT GOETH AWAY.

We frequently receive good impressions from religious instruction. We are convinced of the importance of personal holiness. We become deeply interested in the welfare of our souls. We admit that our characters need improvement. We secretly resolve upon reformation. Those of us who think ourselves christians, resolve to become better; and those of us who think we have not yet begun the christian life, resolve to delay no longer. But when the sunday is passed, and we again become engrossed in the cares of this world, our good resolutions are often forgotten or broken. Our serious impressions are effaced from our hearts. Our goodness becomes as the morning cloud and vanishes away as the early dew. And how can we remedy this common and dangerous evil? What methods can we adopt to render our religious impressions more productive of good fruits? In answer to this question I *will suggest* a few hints.

1. We must cherish our good impressions. We must often call to mind the instructions which awakened our attention, which excited our feelings, which warmed our hearts, which inspired our resolutions, until they become indelibly impressed upon our memories. When the hour of retirement and rest arrives, we must call them to remembrance, and ponder them in our thoughts, and prayerfully seek the assistance and blessing of our heavenly Father. And when the morning light calls us to the active duties of life, we must again bring them to our recollection, and bestow upon them serious meditation, and once more seek for spiritual aid. But we must not stop here. During the labors and leisure of the day, we must again revolve them in our minds until they become ingrained in our very souls, a part of our very selves, governing principles of our conduct. By such repeated and prayerful reflection, we may prevent the sentiments received, the sensations produced, the thoughts excited and the resolutions formed from vanishing away as the morning cloud.

2. Our good impressions must not only be cherished seriously and earnestly and perseveringly; but they must lead to the formation of strong particular resolutions. If we merely resolve to be good in general, our resolutions will yield but little fruit. We must distinguish in our own thoughts, the particular failings we ought to forsake, the particular duties we ought to practice, the particular virtues we *ought to* acquire. We must resolve to be wholly

good, not partially so; good in all particulars, not in a few. We must resolve to be practical christians, in our belief, in our motives, in our feelings, in our dispositions, in our conversation and in our actions; in our reverence and imitation of our Saviour, and in our supreme love and unreserved obedience to our heavenly Father. In short, we must determine to examine impartially and fearlessly into the state of our hearts and characters; to compare ourselves candidly and faithfully with the requisitions of the gospel; to forsake every thing wrong in our principles, sentiments, tempers and conduct, and to perform habitually and perseveringly the incumbent duties of our several situations and relations. By thus fixing our thoughts on definite objects, we shall prevent our impressions, wishes and resolutions from departing as the early dew.

3. We must not only cherish our good impressions, and cause them to produce the formation of particular resolutions; but we must take the proper measures for carrying our good resolutions into immediate execution. For all our serious impressions, all our good resolutions, and all our knowledge of ourselves and of the requisitions of Jesus will be of no avail, unless we proceed to bring forth christian fruits. If we are faithful to ourselves, our work, our building up a christian character, will be constantly going forward. For we shall endeavor to regulate our thoughts, tempers, conversation and conduct, according to the laws of reason, conscience and revelation. And this is the sum and substance of all

religion; and as we are ever thinking, conversing or acting during our waking hours, our habits of thought, feeling, conversation and action, may be daily improving. These habits will constitute our characters. But these we can never greatly improve without firm resolution and unwearied exertions. Let me then illustrate this great work of salvation by a few examples, and show how our good impressions may lead to christian reformation and improvement.

Suppose then I have omitted the duty of secret prayer, and became seriously impressed with its importance. My impressions will become deepened by reflection, and lead me to resolve upon the commencement of the neglected practice. Having noticed the plain command of my Saviour on this subject, I shall seek for motives to aid me in its proper and habitual performance. Convinced that my Father is love and that he is ever ready to hear the devotions of his sincere worshippers, I shall raise my thoughts to him in secret prayer; not occasionally, when reminded of my dependence and obligations by some favor; but daily, at evening and in the morning. And the more I consider the blessings I am daily receiving and the resolutions I am daily forming, the more I consider the hopes I am daily cherishing and the support I am daily needing, the more I consider the laws I am daily violating and the sins I am daily committing, the more materials shall I have for my daily thanksgivings and petitions, confessions and devotions. Realizing that prayer is not

only a duty, but a privilege; a duty which will assist in purifying my heart, and in increasing my love for my maker, and in making me more faithful in all my engagements; and also a privilege which should increase my gratitude and confidence and obedience, I shall persevere in the devout exercise. I shall not permit my devotions to be interrupted by any labor or fatigue or disinclination or pleasure. I shall not release my exertions, until the habit is so thoroughly fixed as to become a natural and even necessary part of my daily happiness. And then no efforts will be needed, for the habitual performance of the duty will become a source of felicity from which I could not readily refrain. In this way and in no other can I become a fervent worshipper of my heavenly Father, and establish the habit of secret devotion. For these means and exertions and reflections are absolutely necessary; and without these all the good impressions in creation will yield no christian fruit.

Suppose also you had neglected to love your neighbor as yourself, and become impressed with the importance of this duty. Your impression will lead to the formation of resolutions, and your resolutions will influence you to use the requisite means and exertions. You will first endeavor to realize that your fellow men are your brethren, offspring of the same parent, entitled to equal rights and privileges and hopes, and exposed to similar trials and infirmities and afflictions. When fully persuaded of these things, you will feel convinced that it is not

only your duty but truest interest to love your neighbor as yourself, and ever to do unto him as you would have him do unto you. This conviction will influence you to banish from your heart all prejudice, ill will and hatred. Whenever you discover in your bosom any thoughts unfriendly to any person, you will immediately endeavor to learn the cause of their existence. If they arise from envy or jealousy or pride, as these are the most fruitful sources of inimical feelings, you will blame yourself; and you will spare no pains until you have banished such tormenting fiends from your mind, and given residence to the peaceful guests of meekness, humility and benevolence. But if upon proper inspection, you think your enmity has been excited by injuries received, you will still remember that you are a disciple of the forgiving Jesus, who has commanded you to love your enemies. You will therefore endeavor to obey your divine master, and banish from your breast all anger and resentment so as not to punish yourself for the iniquities of others. But this will not prevent you from honorably maintaining your rights, or openly acquainting a person with his folly or his iniquity. In this way you may bring your thoughts and feelings into subjection to the law of love.

Your convesartion will require your next attention. And whenever you detect yourself uttering the language of scandal, detraction, slander or uncharitableness, you will pause; and you will inquire of your own breast whether you are acquainted with

all the circumstances of the case, whether you have heard both sides of the question, whether you are influenced by a desire to do good in your communication, whether you are relating the whole truth and nothing but the truth, whether there are not some traits in your own character, some events of your own life, some unguarded expressions of your own lips which might be so magnified and misrepresented as greatly to injure your happiness and usefulness. By such inquiries, your resolution to be guarded in your observations, candid in your opinions, and charitable in your judgments will be formed and strengthened into a habit. But this is not all, for love to your neighbor implies more than merely abstaining from injuring his feelings, influence, property or character. It also requires you to do good unto all men as you have opportunity, and this part of the duty must likewise be confirmed by habits; habits of assisting the indigent, relieving the distressed, enlightening the ignorant, reclaiming the vicious, visiting the sick and sorrowful and being ready for every good word and work. In this way and in no other can you acquire the benevolent disposition of loving your neighbor as yourself. For without these persevering endeavors, all your serious impressions will avail nothing.

The same course must be pursued in obeying any particular command when the formation of a habit is not required. Take the dying request of our Saviour. A person feels convinced of the truth of the christian religion. He believes that Jesus is

the true Messiah. He knows that obedience to his commands is necessary to prove the sincerity of his faith. He realizes that he is as well qualified for the performance of one duty as another; that he is as well qualified to partake of the Lord's supper as to unite in the public devotions. He is seriously impressed with a desire to commemorate the dying love of his chosen Master. If then he would have his impressions productive of obedience, they must be fervently cherished, they must lead to the formation of strong resolutions, and his resolutions must induce him to overcome his doubts, his fears, his indolence and his timidity, and excite him to come forward as a professed follower of the once crucified Jesus. This act of obedience will be the fruit of his impressions. But had he banished them from his mind, or suffered them to evaporate as the early dew, he might have continued year after year in a state of uneasiness, indecision, desire and anxiety; and after all, perhaps have been called to the bar of God without having had sufficient resolution to comply with the last request of his ascended Lord.

Thus, my friends, have I endeavored to exhibit to you the methods by which we can make our religious impressions of each returning sabbath more productive of good fruits. In all this there is nothing unintelligible or impracticable. There is nothing but what you all need and at times desire. There is nothing but what you may all accomplish by resolute and persevering exertions. And if you have any proper concern for the salvation of your pre-

cious souls, if you would act like rational beings in the great business of religious improvement, if you would secure the appropriate reward of attendance on public worship, if you would exhibit a praiseworthy example before your associates, if you would manifest becoming gratitude to your Saviour and your Father, you will not permit these practical hints to vanish as the early dew before the rising sun. No; you will now and ever cherish all serious impressions, and you will forthwith proceed to form strong particular resolutions, and you will instantly take the necessary measures to reduce them to practice, so that you may always grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour.

SERMON VI.

NO ESCAPE FROM THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN BUT IN REFORMATION.

NUMBERS XXXII. 23. BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT.

THERE is a moral distinction in actions. Some are righteous and some are wicked. Virtue and vice are not unmeaning names. They are realities. They are distinct and unalterable in their nature. And no false reasoning can ever make holiness sin or sin holiness. This distinction we all feel and understand. For whatever may be our own character, we approve of goodness whenever exhibited in others. And we as readily disapprove of iniquity whenever and wherever manifested. This distinction is also known and felt in a greater or less degree by all persons in all countries. Go to the most uncivilized people on the face of the globe; tell them some actions are bad and some are good, and you will communicate no information; for they are already acquainted with this natural, simple universal truth. Go even to the French atheists of the former revolution. They decreed that all actions were alike, that the bible was a fable, that death was an eternal sleep, and that there was no God.

But in the hour of honesty, in the hour of death, many of them recanted their pernicious errors, and bore undisguised testimony to the unchangeable distinction between right and wrong; a distinction so deeply impressed upon the heart of man, that it cannot be effaced either by ignorance or error or infidelity or depravity. As well may you attempt to blot the sun from the firmament of heaven as hope to eradicate from the human soul this eternal distinction between sin and holiness.

Not only so. Sin must inevitably punish the sinner. For you well know that it is directly contrary to the nature of holiness. If so, it must be directly contrary to the nature of a holy God. Consequently it must be directly opposed to that spirit in man which proceeds from the inspiration of the Almighty. Now if this reasoning be correct, if sin is thus contrary to the rational nature of man, of moral and spiritual goodness, and of the perfect and infinite Deity, then it must surely be contrary to the very nature of pure mental happiness. For God is perfectly happy only because he is perfectly holy. The degree of angelic happiness must be exactly proportioned to their sinless perfections. And the true felicity of the human soul, both for time and eternity, must depend on its moral goodness. And this consequence is as natural and inevitable as that fire should produce heat, or poison produce sickness. Yes. And the illustration from poison is not inappropriate to this part of the subject. For sin is the same to the soul as poison is to the

body. Take poison and you injure or destroy your health. Commit sin and you injure or destroy your soul's happiness. Expel the poison and you regain your health, although your constitution will be injured in proportion to the quantity taken and the time it is retained in the system. Forsake sin and you regain your happiness, although your soul will be injured in proportion to the degree and duration of your depravity. Until you expel the poison, you cannot regain your health. And until you forsake your sinfulness, you cannot secure rational and spiritual happiness. For so sure as you commit sin, so sure will your sin find you out, in some way or other, sooner or later, in this world or the next.

But this is not all the evidence. Look into the world and you may see the truth of my position completely demonstrated. I would not indeed intimate that sin is always punished or fully punished on earth, but that it is commonly and severely punished even in this world. Select an example of the slightest degree of sinfulness. Take the merely worldly minded man, who is not openly immoral, but who never thinks seriously of God or eternity; who neglects the peculiar requisitions of the gospel, and whose life is regulated by the motives of selfishness, popularity, fashion, expediency, interest. Such an one constantly feels an aching void which no earthly good can ever supply. He is occasionally reproached by an accusing conscience for his sins of omission and commission. He deprives himself of the rich satisfactions which arise from christian dis-

positions, habits, hopes and consolations. And when disappointment or sickness or affliction come upon him, he is wholly unprepared for their occurrence; and consequently they cause him much anxiety and vexation and fear and remorse. And in these several ways his sin of worldliness finds him out, to make no mention of an unhappy death and the want of a scriptural preparation for eternity. Take next an instance of open immorality. Notice the man of intemperance. His unlawful indulgence causes immediate pain and not unfrequently sickness. The seeds of various disorders soon take deep root and undermine the constitution. The balance of temper is destroyed. The tender sympathies of the soul are perverted. The benevolent affections of the heart are brutalized. The moral powers are rendered insensible to good impressions. The intellectual faculties are enervated and shattered. Property is dissipated, family and friends are disgraced, and the order of social life is disturbed. Add to all this, the distressing reflections on the past, the inefficient and broken resolutions of the present, the dismal forebodings of the future, and what earthly punishment more severe need be imagined. Does not his sin of intemperance find him out most effectually, to make no allusion to the future condemnation which awaits him in another existence? Take finally an example of the highest degree of depravity; that which leads to the most inhuman crimes; such as robbery and murder. Probably as many as nine in ten who are guilty of

such desperate sins are sooner or later detected, and compelled to finish their career of wickedness on the gallows. Behold the late Salem criminals, and mark the unexpected means by which their infernal deeds were brought to light. Especially observe, that when the principal agent in this horrid transaction had received the life warrant of the government, and to human apprehension his safety was morally certain, providence so ordered events that an ignominious death became his portion. But should one of this class occasionally escape the detection of his fellow-men, he cannot escape from his own reflections nor from the ever watchful eye of an omniscient God. He must carry a tormentor in his own bosom, an undying worm gnawing incessantly at the very core of his heart, an accusing conscience which in some instances has driven the haunted wretch to make confession of his bloody deed, and has pursued others with its tormenting stings even to self destruction. And thus their sins found them out, in some way or other, sooner or later, in this world or the next.

Now you all admit that some actions are righteous and some are wicked. You also acknowledge that sin will inevitably produce misery, and holiness as surely produce happiness. Why then do any of you knowingly commit iniquity and neglect to perform all your incumbent duties? Why do so many depart from the path of rectitude and walk in the ways of transgression? I will tell you; because sin is deceitful. Yes. Sin is almost infinitely deceitful.

You can scarcely imagine the number of forms she assumes and the multiplicity of temptations she presents. Select the common career of the gamester for an illustration. He sits down to the gaming table perhaps without any intention of injuring either himself or others. He may win or he may lose. If he loses, his mortification induces him to make a second attempt. If he wins, the desire of gain stimulates him to perseverance in the dangerous course. In either case therefore he is under the strongest temptation to continue in the bewitching vice. And in this way many are led on from one step to another, until habits of defrauding, falsehood, profaneness, quarrelling and other kindred vices become thoroughly confirmed. Such is the common and natural progress of every sinner. One slight deviation from known duty is permitted and then another. Each step is but short and the deluded victim is scarcely aware that he is pursuing the road to infamy and wretchedness. For at the outset, no one intends to do any thing very wrong. No one determines to commit any very aggravated transgression. No one means to injure either his own happiness or that of others. And if you tell one of this class of the dangers of his course; if you show him the natural consequences of his downward walk; if you set before him the melancholy end at which he must sooner or later arrive unless checked in his mad career; if you intrude upon his attention a friendly warning, you are almost sure to give offence and not unfrequently the greatest possible offence. For he

is not conscious of intending any such thing. Nay, he intends soon to return to the flowery paths of virtue, and eventually to acquire the highest degree of christian excellence. But still he walks heedlessly along, and consequently habits of sin begin and continue to form, gradually and almost imperceptibly, until he becomes enslaved to the worst of tyrants, the most cruel of taskmasters. Thus deceitful is sin, and in this way it ruins its thousands and its tens of thousands. And against its insidious attacks, its insinuating solicitations, its treacherous wiles, you have no security but in christian principle. For if you are actuated by the motives of the gospel, you will conscientiously endeavor to know the right in every thing and to pursue it with unwavering perseverance. You will be no less solicitous to discover the wrong, and to shun it with a holy watchfulness. For you will never forget the unchangeable degree of the Almighty, that holiness shall reward the righteous, and that sin shall find out the sinner, in some way or other, sooner or later, in this world or the next.

In view of these all important truths, these incontrovertible truths, permit me my friends, and especially my young friends, to speak the word of exhortation.

Beware of exposing yourself to temptation. Would you breathe the infected atmosphere and hope to escape the plague? Would you visit the lion's den and expect to elude his iron grasp? Go not then in the way of temptation. For you know not its mighty power. You are ignorant of its in-

sinuating and deceitful nature. You are not fully sensible of your own weakness. And so sure as you expose yourself to its assaults, so sure are you in danger, in the greatest possible danger. For many have fallen where few have come off victorious. Be therefore ever on your guard. For when you associate with the thoughtless and unprincipled, and passion becomes excited, and imagination heated, and judgment overpowered by feeling; and when temptation assumes the mask of interest or pleasure or friendship or love, all your good resolutions which are not based on religious principle will vanish like mist before the rising sun. Think not that I utter these plain truths to give you pain. Think not that I wish to spread a gloom over the innocent pleasures of life. No. Nothing but a regard to your happiness could induce me to dwell on such unpleasant topics. But I wish to warn you of the dangers to which the young are peculiarly exposed. I wish to set fairly before you that monster sin; your soul's worst, your soul's eternal enemy; the only enemy in the whole universe of God which you have the least occasion to fear. Let your very thoughts then dwell on images of purity and innocence and goodness. Let your leisure hours be devoted to healthful exercise, and profitable reading, and serious meditation. Let your associates be persons of unshaken integrity, uncorrupted morals and instructive conversation. Let your aim in life be elevated, and in whatever pursuit you engage, seek for eminence by persevering industry and unweari-

ed application. Especially strive for the greatest perfection in every thing christian. And ever avoid as you would shun the very brink of the roaring cataract, every species of exposure to temptation.

Not only so. Beware of the first deliberate step in the path of iniquity. Can you play with the very lightnings of heaven and not be scathed? Can you swallow the deadly poison and remain uninjured? Neither can you commit sin and escape its punishment. The fatal results of one guilty step no one can foretell. The first act of open wickedness once committed and others readily follow. The restraints of virtue once wantonly broken and the flood gates of depravity will be thrown open. Once embarked on the sea of iniquity and you know not where you will land. You will be exposed to all the gusts of passion and sensuality, without rudder or compass; and shipwreck, perhaps fatal shipwreck, will be the consequence; for the greatest crimes have proceeded from the smallest beginnings. Read the history of those who have terminated their sinful course on the gallows. Your only security therefore consists in a rigid adherence to the path of rectitude. If you step aside to pluck even one guilty flower, you will assuredly be stung by one tormenting thorn. And be not so unwise as to suppose you can return after a limited indulgence. So have thought thousands, and their self-confidence has proved their ruin. Tamper not then in the least with the deadly foe. If you do, you tamper

with your soul's best happiness; nay, you tamper with your soul's eternal felicity. For the distinction between right and wrong is unalterable and everlasting. The right you may always know. For your common sense, your christian education, your sunday instructions, your anxious friends, your holy bible, will always teach you the way of goodness and enjoyment. Listen then to these monitors. And ever avoid the first guilty step, as you would shun the crater of the burning volcano.

But this is not all. Beware of the second step in the path of wickedness. Allowance may be made for one deviation. You may be tempted by interest. You may be enticed by pleasure. You may be blinded by passion. You may be deceived by falsehood. You may be overpowered by sudden temptation. And in some one or more of these ways you may become involved in guilt. But you will then be sensible of your sinfulness. For you will then experience the reproaches of an accusing conscience. And then is the moment to resolve on reformation. For the work of amendment will then be plain and easy. Return then to goodness. Take not a second step more sinful to hide the disgrace of the first. Because you have uttered one falsehood, tell not twenty more to conceal your iniquity. Because you have once yielded to the power of intoxicating liquor, make not a beast of yourself to drown your painful reflections. Because you have stolen your neighbor's purse, take not his life to prevent detection. Whatever sin you may have

committed, commit not a second to cover its deformity. For this can never be done. This will always make matters worse. This will always increase your guilt and wretchedness. There is no safe way but to return. When convinced of any failing then, have principle enough to reform. And if you have injured either your own character or the reputation and happiness of others, do all in your power to repair the injury. You will then be restored to the favor of yourself, to the approbation of your own conscience. You will be restored to the confidence of the public, for they wish nothing but satisfactory evidence of reformation. You will be restored to the love of God, for he is ever ready to meet the returning penitent a great way off, and welcome him to his bosom and purified family. And unless this course is pursued, your guilt will increase. Yes. When made sensible of your sins, if you have not principle enough to reform, your guilt must increase. For a second step will be taken and then a third, and so on; and at each step, you will plunge deeper and deeper in iniquity and sink lower and lower in degradation, until you become thoroughly abandoned. Avoid the second deliberate step in the path of wickedness, as you would shun the very jaws of hell.

Yes, my young friends, you may lay it down as an incontrovertible, unchangeable, eternal truth, that so sure as you commit sin, so sure will your sin find you out. You may commit sin with the expectation of escaping its punishment. You may employ

the darkness of night and the secrecy of the grave to conceal your iniquity. And for a time you may elude the detection of your fellow mortals. But when you are least aware, some event may occur, some circumstance may arise, which shall reveal your disgrace and your infamy to the world. You may commit sin. You may conceal it from every human being but yourself. Your labors may be crowned with success. The voice of gladness may be heard in your dwelling. The world may lay her riches and her honors at your feet. But with all that time has to offer, you will still be miserable. For your wickedness will have left a corroding disease on your very soul. And you will have a hell within your own bosom, which no earthly offerings can ever quench. You may commit sin. You may affirm that all actions are alike. You may ridicule religion, and scoff at all sacred things. You may plunge into the very vortex of dissipation, and pass along the briery road of transgression until arrested by the summons of death. But his cold hand will dissipate the mists of infidelity and depravity. A knowledge of your desperate wickedness will fill your souls with agony, and convulsive cries for mercy will tremble on your quivering lips. You may commit sin. You may sear your conscience so as to pass even the portal of the grave in your delusion. But when the light of eternity bursts on your guilty soul, you will come to a knowledge of yourself, your wilful disobedience, your sinful pollution, your wretched condition. And a sense, a realizing sense

of your lost and ruined state must fill your soul with indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. How can you then escape the natural consequence of your profligate course? Can you then flee from your own thoughts? Can you then desert your own reflections? Can you then escape from your own soul? Can you then hide from the inspection of the ever present and all seeing God! O no, there is no escape then from the punishment of sin but in reformation. As then you value your present happiness, the peace of a dying hour, and your soul's eternal salvation, I beseech you to remember that so sure as you commit sin, so sure will your sin find you out, in some way or other, sooner or later, in this world or the next.

SERMON VII.

DISOBEDIENCE INEXCUSABLE.

ROMANS I. 20. THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE.

ARE there not some individuals present who intentionally neglect the prescribed duties of religion? Who habitually disobey the commands of the gospel? Who willingly confess to themselves and others that they are not practical christians? If so, I would ask you, my friends, whether you can offer any satisfactory excuse for your neglect and disobedience? Any excuse satisfactory to your reason and conscience? Any excuse which will prove satisfactory in the time of affliction, and in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment?

1. Are the christian commands unreasonable? They require you to love your God with your whole heart. He is the perfect creator of the universe, the parent of all creatures, the ruler of all worlds. His nature is essentially love. He is your ever present and unchanging friend. He has brought you into existence, preserved you in being and crowned your lives with his goodness. You always have been, now are, and ever will be dependent

on him for all you are, for all you possess, for all you enjoy and for all you hope to realize. And is it not reasonable that you should love supremely such an almighty, infinitely merciful, all perfect Father? And if you love him with your whole heart and soul, shall you not repent of all your deviations from his holy laws, and thoroughly reform your erroneous religious opinions, your sinful dispositions and your wicked practices? Shall you not habitually worship him in sincerity and spirit and truth? Shall you not constantly cultivate feelings of gratitude for his manifold favors, and cheerfully submit to the various dispensations of his unerring providence? Shall you not repose unlimited confidence in his wisdom and love, and earnestly strive to know more of his character and perfections and government? Shall you not continually aim to render unreserved obedience to his holy will, and sincerely endeavor to become perfect even as he is perfect? Is it unreasonable that you should cultivate and possess this supreme love for your creator, preserver, benefactor and Father? Is it unreasonable that your affection for this greatest, wisest and best of beings should yield these fruits of christian piety? O no; nothing can be more reasonable.

The christian commands also require you to love your fellow men as yourself. They are your brethren, children of the same nature, entitled to the same rights, and indulging the same hopes as yourselves. They are also partakers in your infirmities *and trials* and afflictions. They are necessary to

your support and comfort, and equally probationers for a future state of blessedness. Christ has labored and died for their salvation as well as yours, and they are by nature equally dear to your common Father. And is it not reasonable that you should love those whom God and Christ love? And if you love them as yourselves, shall you not invariably seek the promotion of their happiness as opportunity, condition and circumstances permit? Shall you not assist with your property, your counsel, your sympathy and your patronage the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed and the afflicted? Shall you not deal justly, love mercy and walk humbly? Shall you not bless those who curse you, pray for those who persecute you, and forgive those who injure you? Shall you not wish well to all, even your enemies, and ever do unto others as you would have others do unto you? Is it unreasonable that you should thus love your fellow men? Is it unreasonable that your affection for them should produce these fruits of christian benevolence? O no; nothing can be more reasonable.

The christian commands likewise require you to love Christ Jesus in sincerity. He is the well beloved son of God, the commissioned revealer of his will, the prince of peace and the Saviour of the world. He came upon earth in poverty, and labored, suffered and died, that he might save you from ignorance, error, sin and death. He has left for your instruction, the words of eternal life, and for your imitation a perfect example. He arose from

the grave, to demonstrate your immortality, and ascended to his God and Father, to prepare mansions for all his obedient followers. And is it not reasonable that you should love such a disinterested, such a compassionate, such an all sufficient Saviour? And if you love him in sincerity, shall you not acknowledge him as the true messiah, the son of the most high, and the appointed head of the christian church? Should you not prize his gospel as a most invaluable legacy, as the very record of eternal life, and make it the only standard of your christian faith and practice? Should you not often contemplate his perfect character, and endeavor to imitate his spotless example? Should you not seek to imbibe much of his meek, humble, forgiving and devout spirit? Is it unreasonable that you should thus love your Saviour? Is it unreasonable that your affection for him should produce these natural fruits of gratitude and submission? O no; nothing can be more reasonable. The christian commands are not unreasonable in their requirements.

2. Are the christian commands impracticable? Can you not love your fellow men, your Saviour and your God, in the manner required? You love other objects, your friends, your worldly occupations and pleasures, and the fruits of your affection appear in your daily conduct. Consequently you possess all the natural faculties of the human soul, and are not prevented from exercising religious love by any natural inability.

Perhaps however you plead a moral inability.

Perhaps you contend that you inherit a nature totally depraved, and that it is an utter impossibility for you to obey the reasonable requisitions of your heavenly Father. Do you understand the full force and meaning of such a plea? You admit that the christian commands were given by God and promulgated by Jesus Christ. You acknowledge that they are not unreasonable in their requirements, and that wilful disobedience is threatened with tremendous punishment. Now, if you affirm that you are not able to render the required obedience, you in reality declare that God who made man, and Jesus who knew what was in man, are either ignorant of man's ability, or are cruel in requiring of him impossibilities. Nor is this all. You in fact assert that they will be unjust if they punish him for not performing commanded duties. So much your plea of moral inability must prove, if it be founded in truth. Far be it from our minds to accuse God either of ignorance or cruelty or injustice. You have ability to obey the christian commands.

But perhaps you plead a disinclination to the performance of religious duties. This may be true in your particular case. And whence arises your disinclination? Is it natural or acquired? Perhaps you say natural, resulting from the fallen nature you have inherited from your first parents. Not so. Reason, conscience, experience, revelation, all assign a different cause for your disrelish for religious exercises. God has given to every individual all the necessary faculties for the performance of command-

ed duties. He places sufficient motives before those of you who have the gospel, when properly considered, to excite you to their habitual performance. Your disinclination is therefore acquired; acquired in various ways; acquired by immersing yourselves in the cares and pleasures of the world; by neglecting the study of your own hearts and the holy scriptures; by disregarding the motives and sanctions of the gospel, and by not cultivating pious affections and religious habits. And I would solemnly inquire, if any one who pleads this disinclination as an excuse for disobedience, can conscientiously say, that he has given the subject of religion his serious and persevering attention? Can you say that you have spent hours and days in close self-examination and a prayerful study of the sacred gospel? Can you say that you have uniformly made a determined resistance to the wicked suggestions of earth-born passions and propensities, to the allurements of a deceitful world, and to all temptation and sin? Can you say that you have used strenuous exertions to keep yourself pure and unspotted from the world, to do unto others as you would have others do unto you, to love your Saviour sincerely and your God supremely? If you have not done all this, and I fear your conscience must testify against you, your excuse of disinclination remains unsatisfactory; and so it must remain until you have made an unsuccessful experiment. But this can never be. No. For no one who sincerely endeavored to love God and Christ and his neighbor ever failed of success. On

the contrary, thousands and tens of hundreds of thousands have succeeded in securing the one thing needful. The pleas of inability and disinclination are both groundless, and consequently the commands are practicable, so that whoever sincerely attempts their performance is sure of success.

3. Is obedience to the christian commands unnecessary? Is it not necessary to secure your present and future happiness? Examine one or two arguments upon this point. God gave you existence. He made you for happiness. He fully understands the wants of your nature. He is also the author of the gospel rules. He has given them solely for the benefit of mankind. Consequently they must be adapted to your condition. Obedience to them must therefore be essential to your felicity.

Now what is thus proved true in theory is confirmed by existing facts. Look at those who live in open disobedience. Are they not punished by their very wickedness? Are they not tormented either by bodily disorders, or mental anguish, or legal enactments, or worldly wretchedness? Most assuredly; for you cannot deny that the way of trangressors is hard. On the other hand, observe the obedient christian. Is he not happy? And do not his purest joys arise from his religious obedience, his conscious integrity, his tranquil passions, his self government, his benevolence, his piety, his blessed hopes of a glorious immortality? Most assuredly. No one will deny that the virtuous character is rewarded in some considerable degree by his virtues,

and the wicked character punished by his iniquity. And if your obedience is absolutely necessary to your happiness in this world, it must be equally necessary for your felicity in the world to come. Because your Father is unchangeable. His laws are immutable. Nothing but moral goodness can yield the reward of happiness under his government. The distinction between sin and holiness is unalterable. You have no promise of being made righteous by a miracle or by a mere passage from death to immortality. Consequently your future felicity must depend on your present obedience to the christian commands.

The case then stands thus. These commands were given to make me good that I might be happy. If I obey them I shall pass through this sinful world comparatively pure. My temporal enjoyments will be greatly increased by my goodness. My present comfort will not be disturbed by a guilty conscience. The pains of my dying hour will not be aggravated by a recollection of past iniquity, or by fears of future misery. And I shall enter the eternal world, prepared for its never ending felicity. On the other hand, if I disobey these commands, my soul will be defiled with sin. My present peace will be destroyed by the baneful effects of my wickedness, and by the ever painful compunctions of an accusing conscience. My character will be degraded, and my company will be avoided by the wise and good. My example and influence may injure my friends, and ruin my offspring, and bring infamy on my name.

The hour of nature's dissolution will be embittered by a painful remembrance of the past, and be rendered agonizing by fearful forebodings of the future. And the just rewards of my misspent life will await my entrance into eternity. Thus two alternatives are before me. On the one hand, a few years of earthly-mindedness and sensual gratification, attended with uneasiness and self-reproach, and followed by future condemnation and misery. On the other, a few years of self-denial and self-cultivation, attended with present satisfaction and inward joy, and followed by future and endless felicity. Which does my reason prompt me to choose? Unless it is very much perverted, nay, unless it is wholly depraved, it will prompt me to prefer happiness to misery. Looking therefore at the character of my Father, the commands of my Saviour, my own nature, and the experiences of the righteous and the wicked, I must acknowledge that obedience to the christian instructions is absolutely necessary to secure my present and future welfare.

If then, my friends, the christian requirements are reasonable, and practicable, and necessary, am I not justified in declaring that you have no satisfactory excuse for your neglect and disobedience? no excuse satisfactory to your conscience or your Father? And if you are living in this known, intentional, habitual disobedience, permit me to assure you, that you are daily acting contrary to your highest interest; contrary to the best feelings of your nature; contrary to the soundest dictates of

your reason; contrary to the clearest convictions of your conscience; contrary to your temporal and future happiness, and contrary to the revealed wishes of your Saviour and your God. And should you be called from this state of probation in your present condition, how would you disarm death of its terrors? Look at the immoral person when brought upon the bed of sickness, and the shadows of the grave are hovering over him, and all earthly objects are fading from his sight; why does he shudder at the approach of the destroyer, and grasp with his hands as if his soul were drowning, and pour forth the bitterness of an agonized conscience? When the heavens are black with clouds, and the lightnings flash vividly, and the thunders roar harshly, and death seems approaching instantly, look at the profligate; why does his pulse flutter, and his strength fail, and his limbs tremble, and his heart sicken? When the stormy winds arise, and the billows of the deep are in commotion, and the fragile bark is at the mercy of the raging elements, look at the profane mariner; why does his soul sink within him, and the paleness of death mantle his face, and the hasty prayer to an omnipresent God tremble on his quivering lips? Do these persons fear the loss of worldly goods? All on earth they would give for one moment's reprieve. Is it the fear of pain, the pain of dying? O no; for this can be but momentary. Is it the fear of an hereafter; a dread of appearing before God, arising from a consciousness of known disobedience to the christian

commands. This fear you can avoid only in one way; only by living soberly, righteously and godly in the present world. And you should also ever remember that the hour is coming, when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the son of man, and come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation. As then you value a happy life, a happy death, and a happy immortality, I beseech you to disobey the christian commands no longer. I entreat you to begin the great work of reformation and improvement immediately; and, relying on the promised assistance of your Father, persevere unto the end, that you may hereafter receive an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading.

SERMON VIII.

FAULTS REMEMBERED AND CORRECTED.

GENESIS XLI. 9. I DO REMEMBER MY FAULTS THIS DAY.

We are all chargeable, my christian friends, with more or fewer faults. They may arise either from our self-ignorance, or our self-partiality, or our self-deception. And unless discovered and corrected, they will produce many compunctions of conscience, greatly diminish our usefulness, and bring much reproach upon our religious character.

I. How then can our faults be called to remembrance? By close and searching self-examination. In order to aid you in the discharge of this important duty, you will permit me to make the following inquiries; and may our ever present Father enable you to return to your own consciences, faithful and honest answers to each and all of my questions.

1. In regard to your personal duties, have you faithfully improved your privileges for mental and moral and religious instruction? Have not your appetites and passions frequently triumphed over the voice of reason and conscience and revelation? Have you not wasted much precious time; abused

many opportunities for improvement, and greatly neglected the proper cultivation of your talents? Have not your thoughts been often vain and sinful? Have not your actions been too much influenced by selfish and worldly considerations? Have not your affections been too exclusively given to the world; to its vanities and pleasures and honors? Have not the moments been few, comparatively few, which you have devoted to the all-important concerns of your souls; to the acquisition of the graces and virtues of the gospel? And for want of proper self-cultivation and self-discipline, have not the rank weeds of worldly-mindedness sprung up in your hearts, and spread their poisoning influence over your whole character?

2. In regard to your social duties, have you loved your fellow-men as yourselves? Have you not often cherished ill will and revengeful feelings towards those who have disappointed your expectations, crossed your wishes, or opposed your interests? Have you not sometimes suffered ignorant prejudice and party feeling to alienate your good will from those who were not of your side; and cause you to throw out designing hints, injurious suspicions, base insinuations, or unfounded charges respecting their motives or principles or conduct Have you faithfully exerted your influence in checking the progress of wickedness and infidelity, and in promoting pure morality and practical religion? Have you habitually ministered of your substance, your sympathy, or your good counsels, to the poor and wretched, the sick and afflicted, the ignorant

and erring? In numberless instances, have you not thought things, and said things, and done things, which you would not wish others to think and say and do, were their case your own?

3. In regard to your religious duties, have you prayerfully studied the sacred scriptures, and sincerely endeavored to make them the only standard of your christian faith and practice? Has not your faith in Jesus been too weak and inoperative? Has your gratitude for his unmerited favors, and your love for his sublime and exalted character, been properly cherished by a frequent perusal of his whole history and an earnest contemplation of his heavenly virtues? When you have endeavored to worship the Father in spirit and truth, have not your thoughts wandered from the great object of prayer, and your affections been cold and languid, and unhallowed motives and selfish desires and unchristian wishes mingled in your petitions. And instead of loving your God with your whole heart and soul and strength, have you not been forgetful of his presence and blessings, and disobedient to his holy will? Are not the faults now hinted at known in a greater or less degree to every one of us who knows his own heart, and is striving to cultivate and exhibit the virtues of the christian character?

II. What effect then should this knowledge of our failings have upon our minds? It should make us humble and charitable and watchful.

1. This knowledge of our faults should make us humble. If we truly know ourselves, we shall not

be elated with spiritual pride. We shall never boast of our merits either for believing much or doing much or receiving much. We shall never say to our fellow sinner, either in words or by actions, Stand by thyself, we are holier than thou. No. We shall the rather say, God be merciful to us transgressors. We shall from the heart freely forgive all who trespass against us, as we hope for divine forgiveness. We shall look upon all mankind as brethren; as children of the same common parent, and equally dear to the universal Father. On religious subjects, sensible of the difficulty of arriving at truth on all points; knowing how much our opinions are liable to be influenced by our feelings, our prejudices, our early associations and our interests; conscious of our liability to err on all topics, especially on those which are incapable of perfect comprehension by finite minds, we shall ever assume the tone of humble diffidence rather than of positiveness; and always keep our judgments open for the admission of further evidence and more light, frankly confessing as well as really feeling, that we may be in error as well as others.

2. This knowledge of our faults should also make us charitable. Knowing our own failings, we shall feel disposed to make proper allowances for the failings of others. The less censorious shall we be, the more we know of our own hearts. Instead of devoting our time and attention to the discovery and publication of our neighbors' faults, we shall find sufficient employment in discovering and correcting our own.

Instead of condemning those who do not embrace our peculiar views of religion, we shall remember that different minds are differently constituted, and differently educated, and differently affected by the same evidence, and under the influence of different impressions and associations and interests and prejudices and passions, and consequently may naturally and innocently arrive at different conclusions on the same subject. We shall recollect that others differ no more from us than we do from them; and that it is as impossible for others to alter their belief without farther evidence, if their belief rests on evidence, as for us to alter ours. While we wish others to believe us sincere in our opinions, we shall cheerfully give them the same credit. And instead of denouncing any as heretics, or infidels, or enthusiasts, for a mere difference in religious sentiments, we shall cheerfully embrace in the arms of our charity all who bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

3. This knowledge of our faults should likewise make us watchful. Temptations beset us on every side. We have foes within and foes without. And nothing but constant vigilance and unwearied exertion can vanquish our spiritual enemies and secure our progress in religion. We should search fearlessly into the deep recesses of our souls' and bring to light the hidden things of darkness. We should often compare our whole character with the requisitions of the gospel, determined to know ourselves, the very worst of ourselves, that we may apply the proper remedies to all our moral maladies. We should labor, by

habitual practice, to make all the duties of religion a pleasure, and often let the pure incense of devotion ascend from the consecrated altars of our hearts. If therefore our knowledge of ourselves makes us more humble, more charitable and more watchful, then will many of our faults be corrected and our characters essentially improved.

III. What means then shall we adopt for the further discovery and correction of our faults? We must listen to the voice of public opinion, friendship, religion and conscience.

1. If we would discover and correct all our faults, we must listen to the voice of public opinion. More or fewer remarks are made concerning us all. Some of them may be wholly true; some partly true, and some absolutely false. We must listen to these so far as to ascertain, by a strict self-examination and a rigid comparison of ourselves with the only rule of duty, whether they are true, or founded in any degree on truth. If upon proper inspection, we detect in ourselves any thing wrong, or which has even the appearance of evil, we must immediately rebuke and forsake it. We must not reject such information because it may chance to come from the gossiping, the unfriendly and the malicious. It is the part of wisdom and duty to give proper heed to all just remarks concerning ones' character, and when made acquainted with our faults, from whatever source the knowledge has been derived, faithfully to confess them, and carefully to apply the wholesome remedies which reason and religion alike prescribe.

2. If we would discover and correct all our faults, we must listen also to the voice of friendship. To give us information of our faults is the kindest act of friendship. He who does not faithfully perform this duty is not a true friend; and he who does not gratefully receive any such intimations, is unworthy the blessings he possesses. Friendship naturally implies an almost unreserved interchange of thought, and the deepest interest in each others' welfare. And shall my friend pretend that he opens to me his whole heart, and that he is deeply interested in my welfare, while he withholds from me his knowledge of my faults, the only information that can essentially benefit me; and if he faithfully performs this delicate, difficult and primary duty, shall I be angry and cast him off? Let those who thus act, denominate their alliance by some other name than friendship. If then we are blessed with friends, we must request them, as they regard our spiritual welfare, to have an eye on our conduct and to be prompt in acquainting us with our faults; and with sincerity and earnestness should we avail ourselves of the least hint from them to amend our characters.

3. If we would discover and correct all our faults, we must listen likewise to the voice from the pulpit. It is the preacher's duty to adapt his instructions to the circumstances and wants of every hearer. If he draws them from his own experience, from his observations on society, and from the volume of inspiration, they will apply in a greater or less degree to every individual. We should therefore listen for

our own direct improvement, and not for the special benefit of our neighbor. We should listen as those who expect to give an account for the use made of all the means of goodness; as those who are deeply solicitous to be made wiser, better and happier. And when we examine the scriptures to ascertain the correctness of the preacher's statements, we must never omit to prove our own hearts and lives by the same holy standard. Let us beware of that misplaced criticism which wastes the precious moments, when our recollections of what we have heard are the freshest, in idle comments on the preacher's talents. The first use we make of a sermon should be the application of it to our own hearts. He who neglects this, let him go to conventicle or to church, and hear the most gifted or the most indifferent preacher, is alike unprofited, and might as well not have gone to the house of worship at all.

4. If we would discover and correct all our faults, we must finally listen to the voice of conscience. We must daily seek to enlighten this inward monitor by the devout study of christian principles. We must let her admonitions guide us implicitly, as a man follows a conducter whom he believes to be trustworthy through paths to himself all unknown. But we must never mistake the wicked suggestions of passion or interest or obstinacy for her instructions. We must not plead conscience as an excuse for any action or any course of conduct, unless it is in strict accordance with the precepts and example of Jesus. Any feelings or any actions which are not sanction-

ed by the plain rules and acknowledged spirit of his religion, are not the fruits of a healthy conscience. We must therefore scrutinize every motive and principle of action and bring them into subjection to the divine standard. And in order to succeed in our endeavors, we must ever accompany our hearing, our reading, our self-examination and our self-cultivation with this humble ejaculation: Lord, cleanse thou me from secret faults; keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins!

SERMON IX.

CHRISTIAN RESIGNATION.

LUKE XXII. 42. NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE.

We are constantly exposed to disappointment and suffering and sorrow. They approach us in every situation and under every variety of form. Neither poverty nor riches, neither ignorance nor learning, neither neglect nor honor, afford any exemption from the frailties and trials and afflictions of humanity. One day we are blessed with a competence of this world's goods. A grateful contentment gladdens our heart. A tranquil joy elevates our feelings. A cheering hope brightens our future prospects. On the next our prosperity is at an end. Some unforeseen event, some miscalculation or negligence of our own, or some misfortune or injustice of another, deprives us of our accumulated treasures, casts us into poverty and dependence, scatters our present joys, and blights our future prospects. At one time the ruddy hue of health flushes in our cheeks. Vigor and strength animate our limbs. Our sensations are lively and acute. And our ideas are clear and vivid. In a short period we are pros-

trated on a bed of pain and sickness. The glow of health gives place to the sallow paleness of disease. The vigor of our limbs sinks into oppressive languor or even infantile weakness. Our sensations become slow, obscure and nearly extinct. And our ideas are broken, confused or blotted out. To-day we possess the confidence and esteem of our fellow men. Our society is sought with eagerness, and our approach is hailed with delight. Tomorrow the demon of detraction and slander is abroad. Our motives and principles and conduct are misrepresented. Our characters are defamed and blasted. And our presence is shunned as pestilential. At one time our circle of relatives is large and unbroken. From their society and friendship we derive improvement and happiness. Either we have parents who correct our youthful follies and errors, council our thoughtlessness, and instruct our inexperience ; or we have children who relieve the wants, alleviate the sufferings, and sustain us under the decrepitude of our advancing years. Either we have husbands or wives, lovers or friends, in whose affection we implicitly confide, into whose bosoms we pour our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, and from whose sympathy and love, we derive comfort and assistance ; or we have brothers and sisters who reciprocate our confidence and regard, direct our pursuits and encourage our good undertakings. But soon, alas ! this circle is broken and diminished. Death takes from our sight the dearest objects of our hearts. A revered parent or promising

child, a beloved partner or endeared friend, an affectionate brother or promising sister is called to the bar of God. And with agonized hearts, we either follow the lifeless clay to the silent grave, or in solitude pour forth the tears of anguish at their unexpected death in a distant land. Thus in various ways are our dearest comforts taken from us, our fondest hopes disappointed, and our souls greatly distressed.

And now, my friends, where will you seek a remedy for these common and unavoidable sufferings? Will you, like some heathen of old, seize the instrument of destruction, and terminate your earthly existence? The soul shudders at the thought. Attachment to life, natural conscience, a dread of an hereafter rise to deter you from an act so cowardly, so inhuman, so impious. Will you, like some unbelievers, plunge into vice and dissipation, and strive to drown your cares and your sorrows in the poisonous streams of sensuality? This would but increase your sufferings, sharpen the stings of conscience, and fill your soul with horror and remorse. Will you, like some weak disciples, cherish a stubborn and unyielding spirit, and give yourselves up to repinings and discontent? This would also aggravate your misery, deaden your finer sensibilities, destroy what is amiable and virtuous in your dispositions, and expose you a prey to consuming fretfulness and melancholy. No. You will seek a remedy from none of these sources. You will look higher for consolation, even to your heavenly Father. For

you must know that a God of infinite love would never expose his frail dependent children to such privations and afflictions without prescribing some adequate remedy. Such a remedy he has given you power to secure. It is christian resignation.

I. What then is christian resignation?

1. Christian resignation is a virtuous disposition of the soul. You may acquire it as you acquire other christian graces. You will bring it into active exercise in seasons of danger and sorrow. Under its influence you will calmly submit to the will of your heavenly Father. You will endure actual sufferings with composure. You will exhibit a filial confidencein the divine wisdom and justice. You will manifest a sincere conviction that all the events of your lives are ordered by infinite goodness. And although you will acquiesce in a state of which you perceive the evils, yet you may justly indulge the hope of some future exemption.

2. You perceive therefore that resignation does not require you to be insensible to your sufferings. Those affections of your nature which cause the bosom to heave with sorrow, and the eye to moisten with tears, are not to be destroyed. They were implanted within us for the best of purposes. They render us social and moral and religious beings. They constitute the glory of humanity. Their proper government and culture forms an important part of our moral discipline. They are indeed to be regulated by the dictates of reason and religion. But neither of these forbid their proper indulgence.

And when the storms of affliction press heavily upon us, we may lawfully give vent to the natural feelings of our troubled souls. In so doing we but imitate the example of the wise and good of all ages. Afflicted Job indicated his sensibility to suffering, by rending his mantle, shaving his head and falling prostrate on the earth. The dutiful Joseph made a seven days mourning for his father. Great lamentation was made over Stephen, the first christian martyr, by the devout men who carried him to his burial. And even the divine Jesus groaned in spirit and wept at the grave of his beloved Lazarus. What these pious worthies have done, what Jesus our great exemplar has done, we may lawfully do; but like him we should ever feel prepared to say, not my will but thine be done.

3. Not only so. As resignation does not require you to be insensible to sufferings, neither does it require you to be silent and inactive under them. True, in seasons of sorrow, you are commanded to be still, and know that the Lord is God. And you are taught that David when severely afflicted was dumb; that Aaron when fire from heaven destroyed his sons held his peace; and that the good man under the yoke of affliction sitteth alone and keepeth silence. But nothing is here forbidden except the language of complaint and the activity of opposition. And by the spirit of these passages, we are also prohibited, either from murmuring against the dispensations of providence, or from cherishing a temper of opposition or sullenness or disquietude. All

these we are forbidden and most wisely too, for they are directly opposed to any filial confidence in God or to any proper submission to his authority. We are however not prohibited, but on the contrary are commanded to call upon our Father in our distress; sincerely to acknowledge his right to afflict and bereave; gratefully to profess our trust in his paternal love, and humbly to thank him for his manifold unmerited blessings. While we acknowledge his hand in our troubles, we should endeavor to improve them to our best welfare. We shall thus be led to a closer self-examination; to a more punctual discharge of every duty, and to a more zealous cultivation and exercise of the christian graces and virtues. We shall adopt measures to render our repentance more thorough, our benevolence more expansive, our purity from worldly pollution more perfect, and our trust and confidence in God more steadfast and unshaken. Under worldly losses we shall labor more diligently to provide things honest in the sight of all men. Under the loss of health we shall be patient, submissive and cheerful. Under the loss of reputation we shall be the more careful to let our light shine before others and avoid even the appearance of evil. Under the loss of friends we shall transfer our affections and redouble our attentions to those who survive. All this we may do—all this we ought to do, in compliance with our holy religion.

4. But this is not all. As resignation does not require silence and inactivity under our afflictions, neither does it forbid the most earnest prayer for de-

liverance from them. This is put beyond a doubt by the example of Jesus. His memorable and touching supplications in the garden for deliverance from those agonizing sufferings which he acknowledged he came to endure, were the most fervent and impassioned that ever ascended to the throne of God. Yet each successive petition to have the bitter cup pass from him was accompanied with equally sincere professions of resignation. Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? But I came on purpose for this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. In conformity with this example we may earnestly pray for deliverance from afflictions. And though infinite wisdom may not see best to grant our requests, yet our souls, by the very act of prayer, will be prepared to receive with composure and sustain with patience all the dispensations of providence.

5. Finally, there is a delusion into which some persons are apt to fall on this subject. They seem to think themselves resigned, when in reality they submit to the will of God reluctantly, and from the mere conviction of their inability to resist it. Inquire why they are resigned, and you are told that God is omnipotent, that he acts his pleasure in the heavens above and amongst the inhabitants of the earth, that feeble man has no power to resist his operations, and therefore they must submit. Consequently they submit, not because their afflictions

are ordered by infinite love and designed to promote their spiritual welfare; not because they cherish a filial affection for their heavenly Father, and are the subjects of his paternal government; but simply because they have not power to oppose the operations of the Almighty. This is not christian resignation. Those who indulge such thoughts and feelings deceive themselves. Their hearts are not right in the sight of God. You thus learn that christian resignation is a calm and cheerful acquiesence in the will of God at all times, but especially in seasons of sorrow and affliction; and that sensibility to sufferings, activity under them and prayer for deliverance from them, are perfectly consistent with this virtuous disposition.

II. What then is the value and importance of christian resignation?

1. You cannot secure the enjoyment of the present existence, unless you acquire and possess christian resignation. As this life is a scene of trial and probation, you can neither expect nor find perfect happiness. When however you consider your various capacities for pleasure and the manifold means provided for their gratification, you must be convinced that God made you for felicity. You must feel satisfied that he intended your joy should greatly exceed your sorrow. You must sensibly realize that he has put it within your power to secure the former and avoid the latter. Now happiness is a state of agreeable feeling. And as you are sensitive beings, intellectual beings, moral beings and religious beings,

you will find agreeable feelings belonging to you in each of these capacities. As sensitive beings, you may derive happiness from the beauties and wonders of nature, and from the charms of music, painting and sculpture. As intellectual beings, you may derive happiness from the boundless stores of knowledge, the free interchange of thought and the sublime operations of intellect. As moral beings, you may derive happiness from the practice of virtue, the exercise of the social and domestic affections and the approbation of conscience. As religious beings, you may derive happiness from loving, worshipping and serving your heavenly Father, contemplating his character, perfections, providence and revelation; from a filial trust in his love as made known by his anointed Jesus, and from that moral purity and religious elevation of soul produced by a practical conformity to the gospel. Such in general terms are our capacities and means of happiness. And as to the degree of our enjoyment, it depends principally upon ourselves, upon the manner in which we improve our capacities, and the spirit with which we receive and relinquish the various blessings of our mortal existence.

Now, my friends, if you would secure any good degree of temporal happiness, you must possess and maintain in all the changes of life a proper spirit of resignation. For this will influence you to consider God as your Creator, your moral governor, your merciful Father, who has a perfect right to do with you and yours as seemeth him good, and who will

ever exercise over you that government which has the most direct tendency to promote your highest interests. You will regard yourselves as his creatures, accountable to him for all your talents and privileges, and indebted solely to his goodness for life and its attendant favors. You will receive all the adversities and afflictions of mortality as fatherly chastisements, originating in infinite affection and designed to animate you in a more faithful discharge of all your duties. You will relinquish all earthly comforts when he sees proper to take them, with cheerfulness, and ever manifest filial gratitude for all the mercies he is pleased to bestow. A spirit of true resignation will cause you to cherish such views of the character and government of God, such dispositions for receiving and relinquishing the blessings of life; and consequently will qualify you for receiving and enjoying the highest degree of earthly happiness.

But on the other hand, if you are destitute of this resigned and submissive temper, you must also be deprived of this enjoyment. For instead of receiving the pleasures of life with gratéful feelings, which are happy feelings, you will be filled with discontent, which is subversive of all rational comfort. Instead of cheerfully submitting to the troubles and disappointments and afflictions of life, you will regard them as real evils, and thus be led to indulge in fretfulness and complainings and repinings, which destroy the equability of your tempers, foster habits of disquietude, and dissipate all the amiable qualities of your hearts. From God or religion, you can derive no satisfac-

tion; for your wills will be in opposition to the divine will. From your fellow men you can derive no pleasure; for while your bosoms are filled with envy and other evil passions, you can exercise no genuine benevolence. Consequently you cannot secure the happiness of the present existence.

2. You cannot secure the happiness of heaven, unless you acquire and possess christian resignation. For this can be attained only by obtaining the necessary qualifications for its enjoyment. And these consist in a conformity to the moral image of your heavenly Father, by which your soul is prepared for admission into his holy presence; in a supreme love for his character; in a delight and fondness for his worship; in an unlimited confidence in his wisdom and benevolence; in a freedom from earthly pollution, and in an actual possession of the christian temper and character. How can a person destitute of resignation make this necessary preparation? Can a person who murmurs at the dispensation of God love him supremely? Can a person who repines under the fatherly chastisements of God worship him sincerely? Can a person who complains of the partiality of God trust in him implicitly? Can a person who manifests a spirit of opposition to the authority of God obey him unreservedly? Can a person who exhibits none of the spirit of Jesus, and imitates none of his examples, and submits to none of his laws, be one of his true followers? Surely not. Neither can an unresigned person obtain deliverance from earthborn passions and propensities; or ac-

quire the heavenly graces and virtues and affections of the gospel. For the indulgence of such a temper, has a direct tendency to produce hardness of heart and blindness of mind, and to destroy the benevolent sympathies and tender charities of the soul, the virtuous and amiable dispositions, everything lovely, praiseworthy and religious. Consequently you can neither secure the enjoyment of this life, nor the necessary preparation for heavenly happiness, unless you acquire and possess christian resignation.

III. How then can christian resignation be acquired? As we acquire other virtuous dispositions, by moral culture and religious discipline. The feelings must be restrained within proper bounds by spirited and repeated efforts. And the mind must be often exercised upon such subjects as have a natural tendency to produce filial submission to the divine will. Some of the most important topics of meditation I will now mention.

1. Would you acquire christian resignation, you must reflect much upon the character and perfections of God. Correct views on this most important subject will have a powerful effect in producing filial submission. Such views you may obtain from three sources; from nature, providence and revelation. These three have the same author; for he that made the world governs it; and he that governs the world has spoken to its inhabitants by his chosen prophets, and especially by his well beloved son Jesus Christ. These three not only have the same author, but they speak the same language,

concerning his divine perfections, though with unequal degrees of distinctness. The works of nature teach you that there is one supreme creator, infinite in power, wisdom and benevolence. The events of providence assure you that he rules the creatures of his hands in righteousness, justice and mercy. The instructions of revelation convince you that his nature is essentially love; that he is really and truly your ever present Father. Not only so. You learn that he is the common parent of the human family, having made of one blood all nations of men. You learn that he is no respecter of persons, but accepteth all who fear him and work righteousness. You learn that he is kind and bountiful, even to the disobedient and unthankful, not willing that any should perish but desirous that all should come to repentance and be saved. You learn that he is long suffering, more ready to grant the requests of his sincere worshippers than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their offspring. You learn that he afflicts not the children of men willingly, but solely for their best welfare. Above all you learn that his unspeakable love for his human family, notwithstanding their base ingratitude to the best of fathers, and their wilful disobedience to the wisest of laws, has caused him to send his own son to save them, by his instructions, example, sufferings, death and resurrection, from ignorance and error, from superstition and condemnation, from misery and death. And with him will he not freely give you all things?

Most assuredly. He will withhold no good thing from the obedient children of his affection.

Such, my friends, is the character of your Father as made known in the volumes of nature, providence and revelation. Being perfect in all his attributes, you perceive that he could give existence to rational creatures for no object but their own happiness. Being essentially love in his nature, you see that he can never afflict his dependant children in anger or wrath or resentment. Being indeed a Father of his whole family, you understand that he can have no interest separate from the best ultimate welfare of all his offspring. These views, you notice, are rational and scriptural and consolitory. Let them be constantly cherished in your souls. Let them excite you to the habitual love and worship and service of your all perfect creator. And when clouds and darkness seem to veil his face, when he takes from you those comforts which he gave, when your hearts are swelling with sorrow and grief, let these views of his character give you comfort. Still look up to him as your Almighty friend; still bless his holy name. For meditation on such topics will lead you to feel an unshaken confidence in the supreme parent, and increase your love for his excellencies, and make you truly submissive to his all wise dispensations.

2. Would you acquire christian resignation, you must reflect much on the doctrine of an overruling providence. You will remember that your Father is every where present, and either directs or permits

all the occurrences above human control. Do you ask for proofs of this truth? I prove it from the divine attributes. Must not he who created all things necessarily be present in all parts of his creation? I prove it from the involuntary suggestions of the heart of man. In times of danger does it not spontaneously send forth its prayers to an omnipresent Deity? And do not these cries of distressed nature almost as certainly ascend from the skeptic, the infidel, the idolatrous heathen, and the superstitious savage, as from the pure and holy bosom of the devout christian? I prove it from your own experience. Who of you has not suffered days of affliction and night's of sorrow? Who has not had his wishes opposed, his expectations disappointed and his fondest hopes blasted? And what friendly arm, what kind power has supported you under all your disappointments, sufferings and sorrows, but the ever-present, all-knowing, all-sustaining Father? I prove it from the declarations of Jesus. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the notice of your constant preserver, and even by him are the very hairs of your head numbered. Yes. God is every where present. He either directs or permits all the events of your existence which are beyond your control. In him we all live and move and have our being. Let this comforting, this sustaining, this purifying doctrine be ever present to your minds. Let it preserve you from sin and despondency, and incite you to virtue and obedience. Ever remember that whatever be your situation, whether afflict-

ed by disappointment or poverty or sickness or loss of friends, your Father is at all times present with you; he knows your distresses; he hears your cries, even the humble whispers of your heart; and he will have compassion on your trials, and dry up your tears, and remove your sufferings, whenever they have produced their destined effects on your hearts and lives.

3. Would you acquire christian resignation, you must reflect much upon your condition as creatures of a heavenly Father in a world of discipline and probation. As creatures of God you are ever at his disposal. You have ever been, still are, and always will be, wholly dependent on his love for your existence and all its blessings. And shall not a perfect creator do as he pleases with his own? Will you not rejoice in your dependence on a governor so wise, and a Father so merciful? Will you not commit all your concerns to his unerring guidance? And as probationers for a better existence, you must necessarily experience a mixture of suffering and enjoyment. All your trials are the result of infinite wisdom and benevolence, and are designed to train you up to high degrees of holiness, that you may be prepared for greater degrees of happiness both here and hereafter. For if your maker is essentially love, can he have any other object in his dispensations? Would any of you who are parents adopt any measures with your children, but such as you really believed would promote their real interests? And can you have the presumption to suppose that you are better than your heavenly Father? No; you

wish to see your offspring happy, and you would do all in your power to secure their improvement and goodness and enjoyment. They are free agents and have the ability either to comply with your wishes or disregard your kind intentions; and they must reap the reward of their own courses. So with your Father in heaven. He desires the best good of all his dependent creatures; and all his dispensations whether called afflictive or joyful are intended to make them wiser and better and happier. But they are free agents; they have the power to improve or abuse all his favors or chastisements, and if they bring misery upon themselves the fault is their own. If then you believe that you are creatures of an all-perfect Father, and in a world of discipline and probation, you must admit that every afflictive dispensation is designed for your true spiritual interest. You must also acknowledge that you have ability to render all such events productive either of improvement in moral goodness or of an increase in wickedness and consequent wretchedness. How careful then ought you to be, my friends, to make a wise and salutary use of all your trials? Every disappointment should remind you of the uncertainty and vanity of all earthly expectations; and teach you the necessity of acquiring a preparation for endless felicity beyond the grave. Every worldly loss should excite you to lay up treasures in heaven where neither moths can eat nor rust corrupt nor thieves steal. The loss of endeared and virtuous friends should inspire new ardor in making all proper preparation for the

last trying hour, and for a joyful entrance upon the rewards of heaven.

4. Would you acquire christian resignation, you must frequently contemplate the example of Jesus. His public ministry, from his temptation in the wilderness to his agonizing death on the cross, was one continued scene of labor and fatigue, suffering and persecution, sorrow and affliction. And though his conduct and motives were pure and disinterested; though he devoted himself wholly to the welfare of mankind; though he continually went about doing good; yet he was calumniated and slandered; he was exposed to insults the most provoking; to malice the most inveterate; to bigotry the most intolerant, and to cruelty the most inhuman. Amidst all these unprovoked and unmerited trials he ever maintained a spirit of perfect resignation to the will of his heavenly Father. 'View him in the garden when the dreadful scene of shame and suffering he had to pass through most strongly affected his imagination; when death in the most terrific form presented itself to his mind. His soul was exceeding sorrowful, he was filled with anguish, yet he was perfectly resigned. In his agony he prayed, Father if possible let this cup pass from me; then he uttered the greatest words he could utter on the occasion; nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt. How patiently he endured all his bitter sufferings, the cruel treatment of his enemies, even death itself. He showed no restleness, uttered not a murmuring word. He declined the stupifying draught when presented to him.

He went through the awful scene with magnanimity. And while suffering the excruciating tortures ofthe ignominious death, he prayed for his unfeeling murderers; and with his last breath expressed his confidence in God. Father into thy hand I commend my spirit!' This heavenly example, my friends, was left for our imitation. These sufferings were endured for our salvation. And will any who wish to be called his disciples sink under their light afflictions; afflictions ordered by paternal love and designed to work out for them a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory? Go christian! study the spotless example of your divine master; make it the subject of your contemplations, until you have imbibed much of his heavenly spirit; and let your life, your meekness and humility, your patience and resignation testify that you are indeed and in truth a consistent follower of the heavenly Jesus.

5. Would you acquire christian resignation, you must fully realize that there is a future state of righteous retributions. The time of our earthly probation will expire at the hour of death. Our bodies will be consigned to their kindred dust, and again subserve some useful purpose in the economy of the universe. Our minds, our souls, will arise, will enter the spiritual and invisible world, there to be judged according to the deeds done in the body, there to be happy or miserable according to the characters here formed. And while the impenitent must necessarily eat the fruit of their own doings,

the righteous will be blessed with an eternity of happiness in heavenly mansions, where the powers of the soul will forever expand, where the devout feelings of the heart will be called into constant exercise, where all tears will be wiped away, where all pious friends will meet never again to separate, where no sin nor sorrow nor death can ever come; but where the society will consist of the spirits of just men made perfect, of an innumerable company of angels, of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and of God the universal Father.

Here christian, is an inexhaustible source of consolation under all your sufferings; a powerful incitement to the cultivation of a resigned and submissive spirit. For this doctrine assures you of another happy existence. You are assured that though you now suffer, either from poverty, or bodily infirmities, or the misconduct of friends, or the disappointment of dearly cherished hopes, or subjection to vicious propensities and sinful practices; yet when this scene of trial and discipline has passed, you will be received into mansions of eternal glory, where nothing that can hurt or defile or grieve can enter. And though you are from time to time called to part with friends beloved, yet you know your separation will be but short. In the path they have trod you must quickly follow. You will find them waiting on the shores of eternity to welcome you to their blessed abodes. Be ye not troubled, but ever remember, that while you attend their lifeless bodies to the grave, angels are conducting their souls to

the bosom of God, that while your eyes are suffused with tears of sorrow, their spirits are swelled with joys unspeakable; that while their funeral anthem trembles on your tongues, they are joining the angelic choirs in the song of redeeming love; that while you are mingling your prayers with the pious on earth they are uniting with the countless millions of ransomed souls, in ascribing glory and honor, thanksgiving and praise to Him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

6. Would you acquire christian resignation, you must cultivate the habit of frequent and fervent devotion. A life of prayer is at all times essential to the christian character; and the inducements to its regular performance are numerous and weighty. But in an especial manner is it urged upon you as christians by the precepts and example of your acknowledged master. He lived a life of prayer. Yes; he prayed at his baptism. Before choosing his disciples he went into a mountain to pray. He took three of his disciples apart to pray immediately before his transfiguration. On the night which Judas betrayed him, he fervently addressed God in the presence of his disciples. During his memorable agony in the garden, he prayed with uncommon intensness and perseverence. And while his murderers were nailing him to the accursed cross, he prayed even for their forgiveness; and at length expired with a devout commendation of his spirit to his Father. His precepts are in unison with his example. In that day ye shall ask me nothing; but whatsoev-

er ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will do it for you. Be persuaded then to look up to your ever present God at all times, but especially in seasons of adversity and affliction. This will most assuredly aid you in acquiring the spirit of resignation.

Thus, my friends, I have endeavored to show you the nature, importance and means of acquiring christian resignation. Will you not be induced to use every possible exertion for the attainment of this virtuous and necessary disposition? You are indeed urged by the most powerful motives. Would you avoid the miseries of this life and secure its happiness? Would you be blessings to your friends and to the whole circle of your connexions? Would you be calm under all trials and ever possess a heaven in your own bosoms? Then you will asiduously cultivate christian resignation. Would you manifest your faith and confidence in the existence and paternal character of your creator? Would you exhibit your filial affection for your unchangable friend and Father? Would you show your gratitude to your constant and unfailing benefactor? Would you discover your allegiance to your moral governor? Then you will perseveringly strive to attain christian resignation. Would you proclaim your belief in the anointed saviour? and your cordial reception of his divine instructions? and your practical admiration of his spotless example? and your unreserved obedience to his salutary commands? Then you will ever maintain a spirit of christian resignation. The language of your lips and lives will ever be, not my *will but thine* be done.

SERMON X.

GOD IS LOVE.

JOHN, IV. 16. GOD IS LOVE.

God is love. To this truth every thing around and within us bears ample and unequivocal testimony. What but infinite benevolence could have prompted him, when perfectly happy in himself, to send into the boundless fields of space such an infinite variety of worlds? What but this could have caused him to create man, and subject to his dominion this lower world, with its innumerable millions of the brute creation? Nothing but infinite love. God must necessarily be a perfect being. And because a perfect being, he must consequently be perfectly happy. Not then to increase his own happiness, has he given existence to men, but solely for their happiness. Can this be doubted?

When you consider yourselves, the variety of objects by which you are surrounded, your capacities and means of enjoyment, can you doubt that God made you for happiness? Can you contemplate the heavens, the work of his fingers; the sun which he has appointed to rule the day, shining in his strength;

the moon which he has ordained to watch the night, walking in her brightness; and the starry host with which the heavens are adorned, without being solemnly impressed that these works of his power and wisdom were intended to increase your happiness? Can you survey the beauties and blessings and wonders of nature; the green carpet that covers the earth; the variety of flowers and plants and trees that spring from her bosom; the valleys clothed with the autumnal harvest; the hills and plains covered with flocks and herds; the waters stored with fish; and the groves resounding with the cheerful melody of the feathered songsters, without acknowledging that these unfailing pledges of his love are given for your happiness? Can you consider the sublime operations of intellect; the boundless stores of knowledge; your means and capacities for holding converse with the wise and great of past and present time; and your ability to soar beyond the bounds of earth on the wings of imagination, without confessing that these fruits of paternal love were designed solely for your happiness? Can you experience the delights of society and friendship and love; the tender charities of the domestic circle; the satisfaction of virtuous habits; and the smiles of an approving conscience, without knowing that these blessings of a Father's love make you happy? Can you seriously meditate on the character of God; on the love and resurrection and gospel of his son; on your destination to a future, a never ending state of existence; can you enter the service of your

heavenly Father, give him the undivided homage of your souls, and hold sacred communion with the Eternal One, without feeling that he is love, that you were made for happiness, that you are happy? O no. These are arguments which the power of sophistry can never shake. They stand as firm as the throne of heaven.

But this is not all. God not only made man for happiness, but he has ever done what was consistent with his moral freedom to promote his happiness. When man had suffered the law that is in his members to triumph over the law that is in his mind; when he had disobeyed the voice of conscience and fell from his primitive innocence; when from a feeling of self-condemnation he had voluntarily withdrawn from spiritual worship, and consequently from pure happiness, his Maker had compassion on his self-inflicted misery; he still loved him as before, and he took new measures to bring his wandering feet into the paths of peace. He called Abram, the father of the faithful, to separate from the prevailing idolatry and corruption; and directed him to establish the worship of the one true God of heaven and earth. He gave a promise that in him and his seed, all nations should be ultimately blessed. Afterward he revealed himself to Moses, the lawgiver and temporal Saviour of the Jewish nation; and continued his revelation at successive periods to the favored people by the holy prophets. This dispensation, though imperfect, being only the promise of better things to come, was sufficient to guide those to hap-

piness who followed its glimmering light. Many followed and were happy, were blessed with prosperity in life, and at a good old age were gathered to their fathers in peace. But the number of the faithful decreased, until the last breathings of acceptable worship seemed vanishing from the earth. At this most proper season, this fullness of time, the Star of Bethlehem arose. The song of angels was heard in Judea, proclaiming glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards man; and announcing the birth of Jesus of Nazareth the Saviour of the world.

At the age of thirty, when Jesus received baptism from his forerunner John, the holy spirit descended upon him without measure, and qualified him for his godlike undertaking. He then entered upon his public ministry; and proved by his labors, his instructions, his sufferings, his death, resurrection and ascension, that he was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. His labors were abundant. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, comforted the sorrowful, cleansed the leprous, restored soundness to the lame, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead. His instructions were divine. He declared the paternal character and essential benignity of God, and the spirituality of his worship and kingdom. He gave motives and rules for the regulation of human conduct in all its relations; and exemplified their happy influence in every scene of his eventful life. He has left for our instruction and consolation the words of eternal wisdom, and for our *imitation* a spotless example. His sufferings were

various and intense. He was exposed to the contradiction of sinners, he was borne down by the agonies of the garden, he submitted to the ignominious and excruciating death of the cross. By his resurrection our immortality is demonstrated, and by his ascension to our God and Father we are assured that mansions will be provided for all his followers. All his labors were performed, all his instructions were given, all his sufferings were endured, to rescue man from ignorance, error, sin, misery and death, and to qualify him for present improvement and happiness and eternal felicity. Could anything but disinterested love have prompted God to plan and Jesus to execute this dispensation of mercy and benevolence; a dispensation intended solely for our happiness?

And what has been the effect of the gospel dispensation? Beneficial. Human happiness has been increased in the same degree in which this his divine religion has exerted its saving influence on the hearts and lives of individuals. And this influence has not been small. No. Notwithstanding the early corruption of its primitive simplicity by its heathen converts, and the early perversion of its plainest doctrines, duties and ordinances; notwithstanding the long, dark night of monkish ignorance and papal superstition, and the unintelligible, nonsensical disputes of the schoolmen; notwithstanding the oceans of innocent blood which its pretended friends have caused to be shed in the days of persecution and holy warfare, and the unchristian spirit and immoral conduct of its self-deceived votaries; notwithstanding the

scurrilous and witty and ingenious attacks of its enemies, and the mountain mass of creeds and confessions and formularies of faith which its fearful, misguided, zealous believers have heaped upon it, until its heaven-born form and spirit have nearly disappeared; notwithstanding all that it has suffered from friends and foes, it has not only survived and spread, but produced salutary and happy effects wherever it has been embraced. Its good effects have been proportioned to the degree of purity in which it has been received and obeyed.

Yes; when Jesus appeared on earth, mankind were sunk into the most deporable ignorance of everything relating to the existence and character of the one true God; the nature and object of his moral government; his designs respecting his human family, and the performance of acceptable worship and obedience. With a few exceptions, they were fallen to the lowest depths of mental darkness and servitude, tormented with the vilest superstitions, given to the practice of the most abominable immoralities, and wedded to a system of the grossest idolatry; and woman was the unhappy victim of domestic tyranny, servile drudgery, watchful jealousy, mental degradation and moral debasement. But thanks to Heaven, a spark of that divine love which emanated from the bosom of God, and shone with such brilliancy in the character of Jesus, soon entered the soul of degraded man; the celestial fire was kindled on the altar of his heart; its heat and light spread a purifying influence far and wide, and an exten-

sive revolution in the moral and religious world ensued. The worship of the one true God was resumed. The precepts of the Saviour were obeyed. The social and domestic affections were called into exercise. The benevolent sympathies of humanity were awakened. Hospitals and asylums for every species of misery have been their fruits. And woman was restored to that equal participation in the refined enjoyments of literature and religion, to that equal rank in society, and to that high place in the affections of man for which God designed her.

And would you see more clearly the influence of christianity on your social, domestic and religious enjoyments, you have only to compare the present social, domestic and religious state of India, the most enlightened of any unchristian nation, with that of your own favored community. If in imagination or reality, you visit her shores, you may see her females debarred from all the delights of society and friendship, doomed to ignorance and hopeless servitude, and degraded to a state of mere animal existence. You may see her living infants swelling the tide of the sacred ganges; her living widows consigned to the flames of a hellish superstition, and the sick and aged left to linger out the last hours of earthly existence, far from the attention of kindred and friends. You may see her temples of idol worship polluted with the most loathsome and infernal practices, and stained with the blood of human victims.

Your own community presents a different picture

for contemplation. Society is adorned by woman. Literature is enriched by the fruits of her intellect. The infant mind receives its first, its best, its most lasting impressions from her maternal care. And home is rendered a scene of the purest earthly happiness by her presence. The sickly infant is nurtured with all the tenderness of a fond mother's affection; and if her kindness and her prayers cannot save its life, its soul is entrusted to guardian angels for conveyance to the bosom of that ascended Saviour, who while on earth took little children into his arms and blessed them as the pure in heart. The bereaved widow finds consolation in the hour of agonizing sorrow, in the assurance of a happy reunion beyond the grave. The last hours of the sick and aged are made as comfortable as the unwearied attentions and kind sympathies of filial affection and christian love can make them; and when the moment of dissolution arrives, their spirits are committed by the voice of christian faith to the hands of him who is unchangeable love. The temples of religion are consecrated to the worship of the one true God, the universal Father. Their doors are thrown open for the admission of all classes without distinction. The sacrifice most acceptable is the homage of contrite and grateful and devout hearts. The instructions there given are for the regulation of human conduct in all its relations. And the worshippers there learn to rejoice in the ennobling and inspiring belief, that after a faithful discharge of all their duties, in this state of suffering and enjoyment, they

shall enter upon an incorruptible existence, and unite with all the ransomed of the Lord, in offering a purer worship in temples not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

And now, my friends, if God is love, if he has created us for enjoyment, if he has provided all the means necessary for our happiness, why are we not more happy? Because we do not love God and and keep his commandments. Because we do not receive Jesus as our Saviour, and imitate his example. Because we are not thoroughly christian in our motives and dispositions and character. If any one is unhappy, the fault is his own. Be persuaded then to reform every thing amiss in your principles and conversation and conduct. Be exhorted to improve in all the christian graces and virtues. Be determined to avoid every thing which is wrong, and practise every thing which is right. Then you will experience that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. Then will you feel that God is love.

SERMON XI.

RELIGION THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

LUKE X. 42. ONE THING IS NEEDFUL.

WHAT is this one thing? Religion. Yes; a firm belief in the eternal existence and infinite perfections of our heavenly Father; a rational faith in the divine mission of our Saviour; an habitual conformity to the requisitions of the gospel, and an unshaken confidence in its sublime promises. Such a belief and such a practice, such a character and such expectations are absolutely necessary to secure our present happiness and qualify us for heavenly felicity. Let me then illustrate the necessity of religion in a few of the most important periods of our earthly existence.

1. Religion is the one thing needful to render domestic life a scene of uninterrupted enjoyment. Marriage was designed by our heavenly Father to be a source of the most perfect temporal happiness; and when the religion of Jesus exerts its governing and sanctifying influence on the heart and life, and causes the wedded pair to cultivate mutual friendship and affection; to be uniformly kind and oblig-

ing, accommodating and forbearing, charitable and forgiving, patient and contented and cheerful, and truly devoted to the promotion of each other's welfare, this benevolent design is answered and this purest of earthly felicity is secured. But when this is not the case, as sometimes happens; when those are united who have no correct knowledge of each other's characters; whose tastes and habits and dispositions are unlike, and over whose feelings and passions and conduct, christian principles exercise no controlling power,—the wise plan of providence is frustrated. Thence arise those complaints and criminations, that unkind treatment and alienation of affection, which render this connexion a state of contention and discord and misery.

But this is not all. The example of parents is ever carefully watched and imitated by their children. And if they habitually disregard the injunctions of the gospel; if the words of profaneness and falsehood and passion often fall from their lips; if the trifles of earth, the failings of acquaintances, the tales of passing scandal, the means and measures for acquiring popularity and wealth, and the follies and fashions and amusements of gay life constitute the chief subjects of conversation; if the supply of animal wants, and the gatification of vain desires, and the promotion of temporal aggrandizement are made the principal objects of attention and pursuit; if no decided respect is shown for undeviating rectitude and moral goodness; if the word and ordinances of God are slighted, and they attend the sanctuary only

in conpliance with fashion or habit or a love of excitement and display; if the christian instruction of their children is neglected; if the good seeds of virtue and piety are never implanted in their tender minds; if the pernicious weeds of vice and ungoverned passion are suffered to spring up and flourish unchecked; if they are permitted to resort to places of idleness and dissipation for amusement or companions; after such an education, if they become useful and religious members of society, it will not be in consequence of the example and instruction of their parents. They may indeed, as some few have done, break the shackles of ignorance and irreligion and become ornaments in our christian community. But this is scarcely probable. For they will be peculiarly exposed to so many and so powerful temptations; to temptations from undisciplined passions and ungoverned desires, from thoughtless and profligate companions, from vice and infidelity in a thousand enticing forms, that there is danger, great danger, the greatest possible danger of their becoming pests to the community, scourges to their friends and curses to themselves. And all this would be but the natural consequence of the examples they have seen and imitated, the instructions they have received and followed, the principles they have imbibed and obeyed, and the habits they have formed and strengthened while under the paternal roof.

On the other hand, if the parents endeavor to regulate their conduct and their household by the precepts of religion, if they are kindly attentive to each

other's wishes and wants, mild and equable in their tempers, circumspect and amiable in their manners, true and candid and improving in their conversation; if they manifest the sympathies of an expansive benevolence, and exhibit the fruits of genuine goodness and unaffected piety; if parental discipline and instruction be added to this worthy example, and their offspring are early taught to obey the dictates of their parents and their conscience and their Maker; if their risings of rebellious passion are checked and controlled, and they are aided in forming habits of truth, honesty, industry, self-government and virtue; if they are assisted in cultivating cheerful, contented, generous, happy dispositions; if they are instructed to look upon the honors, emoluments and pleasures of this world as uncertain, temporary and unsatisfying, and upon christian goodness as the one thing truly essential to their happiness in every period of their existence; if they are induced to believe that the religion of Jesus is a certain guide to peace, usefulness, respectability, happiness and salvation, and that God is their ever present, all perfect, unfailing friend and Father; if thus educated by precept and example, they will be prepared for the evils that are in the world. And though they may leave the happy scenes of infancy and childhood with regret, they will soon secure the esteem of all who know them. They will be blessings to their friends and ornaments to society. And should they be greatly exposed to the influence of corrupting example, in the moment of strong temptation, if their

early impressions, their virtuous habits, their christian principles will not save them from ruin, there is good hope that they will be saved by the remembrance of a virtuous home; by the recollection of a brother's affectionate warnings, a father's agitated countenance, a sister's earnest entreaties, a fond mother's tears. If then you would have uninterrupted happiness in your family circle, you must cherish religion on the domestic altar. Her heavenly influence must purify your motives, refine your feelings, mould your dispositions, elevate your affections, dignify your conversation and direct your conduct. Then will you have felicity in your own bosoms, and the same blessing will rest upon your dependants and children.

2. Religion is the one thing needful for our comfort and support in the dark hour of adversity. We are in a world of continual change. Many are now low in misfortune who were once at the height of prosperity. This may be our condition. And when we are deprived of our competence or affluence, when we are slighted or deserted by the friends of our better fortunes, when the trials of poverty spread a gloom over our spirits, when the stern hand of justice compels us to relinquish the comforts of domestic life, if in this dark and trying hour, we have not the consolations of religion, but are reproached by our past lives; if we have been idle or dissipated, prodigal or covetous, proud or tyrannical, cruel or unjust; if we have insulted the virtuous citizen, or defrauded the industrious laborer, or abused the

honest dependent, or driven from our presence the deserving object of charity; if we have slighted the teachings of Jesus, and neglected the service and worship of God; if this be our character, miserable indeed must be our condition; we shall be destitute of that self-approving conscience, the loss of which all earthly things cannot supply; and with the loss of this, we lose all the supports of religion.

But on the other hand, when the storms of adversity press heavily upon us, whether we have fallen from affluence or competence; or have always lived in honest poverty, if we have been temperate and frugal and industrious in our habits; if we have been honest and upright and open in our dealings; if we have bestowed our charitable offerings on the poor and unfortunate; if we have been meek and affable and unassuming in our deportment; if we have cultivated the graces and virtues of the christian character; if we have devoted our powers and talents to the service of God; if we have the approving testimony of our own minds in these things, we shall not be miserable. And let what will come; let poverty beset us in its most appalling forms; let every earthly friend forsake us; we shall not be utterly forsaken of happiness. We shall have that conscious integrity, that moral purity, that religious elevation of soul, which will confer more exalted felicity than the world with all its blandishments can ever give, or with all its frowns can ever take away. And we shall have one friend who will never desert us, one friend who will always listen to our supplications, one

almighty friend and Father who will cherish us in his own bosom long after this world and all its changing scenes shall have passed into oblivion. If then you would have comfort in adversity, you must lay its foundation in religion. You must ever let the heavenly instructions of Jesus dwell on your minds, and be the governing principles of all your actions, until you become christians in faith and temper and practice. And then you will be prepared to triumph, nay, to rejoice in adversity.

3. Religion is the one thing needful to sustain the soul in the closing scene of earthly existence. We connect so many gloomy associations with the idea of death, the wasting sickness, the watchings and tears of anxious friends, the distressing hour of separating, the ghastly corpse, the sable habiliments of mourning, the slow moving hearse, the dismal tolling of the bell, and the last agonising look, ere the object of affection is consigned to its kindred dust, as to render the subject peculiarly unwelcome to our minds. And when any circumstances forces our attention to the period of our own dissolution, we utter the hasty prayer. O let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. And then we banish the chilling thought.

But is death itself so much to be feared? When I have seen the tender infant, sickening in its mother's arms, opening its entreating eyes, and raising its little hands for comfort, then drooping like a new mown flower, and without a struggle sinking into the *sleep of* death, with an angelic smile on its counte-

nance, I have asked, Is this death? It is; but here it has no terrors. And when I have watched the gradual decline of the devoted and youthful wife, the fond and affectionate mother, whose attachments to earth were many and powerful and whose worldly prospects were bright and alluring, and known her to make every necessary arrangement for her own burial and for the welfare of her family with the utmost composure and calmness, and witnessed her affecting imitation of the example of the dying Jesus in commending her rising soul to the hands of her ever present Father, and observed her peaceful and exulting triumph over the power of the universal destroyer, I have asked, Is this death? It is; but even here it creates no fear or alarm or suffering. And when I have stood beside the dying minister of Christ, whose head was white with the snows of more than eighty winters, and heard him pour forth fervent gratitude for the manifold blessings of his long life, and joyfully call upon his paternal Creator to receive his departing spirit, and beheld the last flickerings of the lamp of life before it was extinguished, I have asked, Is this death? It is; but no more frightful than the setting of the summer's sun. But when I have seen one in the strength of manhood, who had lived as he listed, and sneered at the realities of religion, suddenly prostrated on a bed of extreme suffering, and while the fatal disease was fast preying on his earthly frame, heard him calling for the consolations of the gospel, because conscience, an awakened, accusing, condemning con-

science had kindled a hell in his soul ten times hotter than his burning tormenting fever, and after much bodily and mental anguish, noticed the contortions of agony which a miserable death had left on his features, I have asked, Is this death? It is indeed death; and it is death with all its terrors. I know not what death is. I fear not the death of the innocent or the righteous. But I do know what is the *sting* of death. It is sin. And I shall unceasingly pray to be delivered from again witnessing the frightful death of the impenitent sinner.

Yes, my friends, let a man lead a wicked, and irreligious life, and when brought upon the bed of death, if reason keeps her seat, and conscience is faithful in her duty, his last hours may well inspire us with dread. He cannot quench the hell burning in his own soul with all the sophistical reasonings of error and infidelity. The consciousness of past wickedness, the torment of present depravity, and the fear of punishment hereafter, will be his bosom companions. And it will not be in the power of any creed either christian or heathen to relieve his mental agony. No. It is religion alone, the recollection of a well spent life, the possession of christian virtues, a well grounded hope of future felicity, and an unwavering confidence in the infinite Father; it is these and nothing but these that can smooth the pillow of death and destroy its sting. But with these, with the innocence and purity of childhood, with the character of goodness and piety, death is *not to be* feared. Its bodily pangs, even when most

excruciating, can be of but short duration. Its appalling associations can be banished by the force of reason and reflection, its terrors can be dissipated by the cheering light of the gospel, and it becomes the door of admission to regions of glory and eternal blessedness. If then you would have support when called to walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death, you must prepare for it now. You must make religion your friend. You must live soberly and righteously and godly in the present world. And when your earthly pilgrimage closes, no matter how few or how many seasons have rolled over your heads, you will be enabled to meet the summons of death with a smile. With triumphant hope you will thus exclaim, I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith. I have finished my course. I am hastening to the bosom of my Father. O grave, where is thy victory! O death, where is thy sting!

SERMON XII.

GUILT OF SEEKING RICHES BY SINFUL MEANS.

PROVERBS XXVIII. 20. HE THAT MAKETH HASTE TO BE RICH SHALL NOT BE INNOCENT.

RICHES are desirable. They aid in the great work of human improvement. They are necessary to complete the means of intellectual and moral and religious instruction. They are essential to the progress of civilization and refinement. They are blessings. It is our duty therefore to strive for their acquisition by all fair exertions. We are bound by the very laws of our nature to make suitable provision for our animal and mental wants, and to occupy every talent we possess for the promotion of human enjoyment. We are also commanded to labor with all diligence, to perform with zeal whatever is to be done, to provide faithfully for our families and friends, to gather up all fragments so that nothing be lost, and to do good unto all men as we have opportunity. Consequently, reason and revelation regard riches as desirable and useful, and make it our imperious duty to strive for their acquisition. But this is not the whole of the story. For riches, like *every other* blessing, may be abused. And when

the love of wealth becomes excessive, when it gives rise to worldliness, dishonesty, dissipation, quarrelling, theft, robbery or murder, it is surely the root of many evils. And those who yield themselves slaves to this passion cannot be easily induced to become pious and practical christians. It is therefore equally the dictate of reason and religion that there is great evil in the inordinate love of riches; great wickedness in adopting unlawful measures for their acquisition, and great depravity in devoting them to sinful purposes. Let me then describe some of the more common ways in which people make haste to be rich, and mention the pernicious consequences of such courses.

1. The first method for the sudden acquisition of riches which I shall notice is this; the purchase of lottery tickets. Now I do not assert that there is anything sinful either in obtaining a ticket, or in receiving a prize when drawn. But I do affirm that this mode of seeking for wealth is followed by pernicious consequences. Yes; you do actually find some individuals who spend their daily wages for lottery tickets, when their families are really suffering for the necessaries and conveniences of life. Consequently they violate their obligations to provide for their own households, and are therefore worse than heathen. You observe others who expend their whole income for tickets, and at the same time refuse to pay their honest debts. Of course, they practise a species of deception upon their lawful creditors. You notice a third class who pay that

money for tickets, which ought to be appropriated to other and better purposes; to the education of children, social and domestic comfort, or charitable institutions. And therefore they prove unjust to themselves, to their families, and to society. In the mean time, you will recollect that these ticket purchasers have their minds so occupied about the probabilities of their success, that they waste many hours in idleness, suspense, castle-building, painful anxiety or dissipation. You will also recollect, that scarcely one in a thousand ever draws a decent prize. You are indeed assured that there are but three blanks to one prize. But your own observation must have convinced you that there are more than three thousand blanks to one prize of value. And when such purchasers are disappointed, they not unfrequently give themselves up to peevishness, dejection, despair, or iniquity. And how much are those few benefited who draw the higher and more valuable prizes? Probably as many as nine in ten of this class are ruined, body and soul, by their sudden prosperity. Some give themselves to immediate dissipation, and soon terminate their career in disgrace and wretchedness. Others lay aside their useful occupations, and adopt a style of such extravagant living, as soon reduces them to abject poverty. Others again enter largely and rashly into business with which they are unacquainted, and through ignorance soon lose what they so suddenly acquired. And few, very few, have exercised sufficient prudence to make a proper use of their gifts of fortune. Not

only so. Towns are injured by this kind of gaming as well as individuals. Let a thousand dollars be drawn in this place, a knowledge of the fact would induce many others to try their luck in the same way, until ten times that sum was foolishly wasted, and the village proportionably impoverished. Such then are some of the natural and pernicious consequences of endeavoring to acquire sudden riches by purchasing lottery tickets. I am confident you will not consider this an exaggerated statement. Must we not conclude then that this is not an innocent way of obtaining property? Will you not all determine to avoid a practice which is fraught with such private and public evils? I conceive there is but one safe course for you to pursue in regard to this subject. When a lottery is opened for some good object, and you have money to give away, without interfering with the claims of justice or charity, and you can make the sacrifice without one unpleasant feeling or one anxious thought, then you may innocently appropriate your funds to the purchase of lottery tickets, and not until then. And with most of us, such a time can never come. Consequently we can never make haste to be rich in this dangerous and pernicious practice.

2. The second method for the sudden acquisition of riches which I shall consider is this; playing at games of skill and chance. And here again I would not assert that there is any thing sinful in merely playing the game. But can you innocently receive the money *you may* happen to win I think not,

I believe there are but two lawful and right ways of obtaining property. It may be presented to you as a free gift, or you must return some equivalent for the value received. Now I trust you will not pretend that money received in gaming is acquired in either of these ways. For no gamester ever took his seat at the table to play with the intention of giving his property to his antagonist; and surely no equivalent is returned for the amount thus taken. You also know that our laws look upon this practice as criminal, and, in some of the states, the loser may recover the sum lost as money fraudulently obtained by the winner. But this is merely the beginning of evils. For gaming leads to the most appalling consequences. In most individuals, it entices them to anger and resentment, profaneness and falsehood, intemperance and debauchery, the neglect of personal and domestic and social duties. In many persons it destroys reputation, character, usefulness, influence, family peace and prosperity, and everything honorable and praiseworthy. You well know that more or fewer of these evils attend sooner or later upon almost every professed gamester. But allowing that a few escape some of the more glaring vices, do they ever continue long to be men of wealth and moral worth? Can you select from all you have ever known five individuals in the decline of life who are regarded as men of virtue, integrity and piety? Can you name even one individual who has given himself to this detestable vice, who exhibits the character of a good husband and father, a

good friend and neighbor, a good citizen and christian? There may be such instances, but I have never known a single example. Besides these personal and domestic evils, such a practice is exceedingly infectious and contaminating. For if this is a right and proper way for one to obtain riches, it is equally right and proper for all men. Suppose then you were all to leave your respective callings, and begin the business of gambling. How long would you continue before your village would be converted into a perfect hell? No; providence never ordained this as one of the means of securing and honest subsistence. We are made for some mental or bodily labor. And society can never exist, property can never be accumulated, happiness can never be enjoyed, unless each one confines himself to some honest employment. Consequently no one can innocently make haste to be rich by gaming. It therefore becomes our serious duty to avoid this method ourselves, and to use all rational and friendly and energetic means to prevent others from ruining themselves and their friends by this fascinating, polluting, corrupting, degrading, destructive vice.

3. The third method for the sudden acquisition of riches which I shall now examine is this; defrauding lawful creditors. You know that men sometimes commence business under favorable auspices, obtain a considerable amount of property on credit, secrete a large portion of their wealth, and then stop payment. They are willing to turn out the remainder of their merchandize, or to pay so much on a

dollar. As the creditors cannot readily adopt any measures for securing their whole debt, they generally feel compelled to receive what is offered, rather than lose the total amount. Being thus discharged by their creditors, they either commence business again with considerable capital thus fraudulently obtained, or live in idleness and perhaps luxury on the interest of their ill-gotten wealth. Now I do not think this method of acquiring riches is often adopted in the country, nor half so often in cities as is generally imagined. But it is undoubtedly practised in some instances, and therefore deserves a passing notice in this connexion. And while those who fail through the pressure of the times, or some innocent miscalculation, or some unavoidable misfortune, are deserving our sympathy and generosity, those who fail to make money are deserving universal contempt and reprobation. For how does this measure differ from downright theft? It is equally wrong in the sight of heaven and in the view of all honorable men. And its practice is really more pernicious to the community. For the thief is regarded as an enemy to all law and order and honesty, and is justly driven and hunted from all reputable society. But the honorable swindler is allowed to go at large, and pursue that species of robbery which must naturally destroy all mutual confidence, and undermine the very foundation of all proper commercial intercourse. When justice shall be more perfectly administered, some solitary cells in the state prison will be appropriated to the special use of all such unprincipled

defrauders. They now receive a good share of punishment for their unrighteous deeds, although they escape the penalty of the civil law. For they are uniformly regarded and mentioned as destitute of principle or honor. They are looked upon with distrust. Little or no confidence is placed in their word. And with all this they are perfectly acquainted. For their own conscience is constantly reminding them of their iniquity. They also feel as if their baseness was known to all around them, as if it entered as largely into the thoughts of others as their own, as if all their acquaintances pitied or despised them. And even this is not all; for although they may succeed in obtaining some riches in this wicked method, and thus be enabled to secure the conveniencies and elegances of life, they can possess no inward peace of mind. A worm is continually gnawing at the root of their enjoyment. Their bosoms are filled with fears and terrors. They have lost all self-respect, and actually despise themselves. They have no sympathy with the honorable and virtuous. In every season of danger their alarm is painful and overwhelming. And the approach of death finds them in the greatest consternation, because they cannot look back upon such transactions with any feelings but shame and remorse, and because a consciousness of their guilt harrows up the anguish of their souls and fills them with the most fearful forebodings of future misery. Is it not evident then that riches obtained by defrauding lawful creditors will give no satisfaction, but prove a constant source of uneasiness

and wretchedness? And if so, no rational man will hasten to become rich in this manner.

4. A fourth method for the sudden acquisition of riches which I shall now describe is this; dishonesty. This is a very extensive topic, and one with which I have no great acquaintance. I merely know that unfair means for securing wealth are occasionally adopted in almost every occupation and profession. All men wish to obtain a subsistence, and many are seeking for something more. Some of the number may always be mentioned who are ready to resort to any measures for the acquisition of property which public opinion and the laws of the land will admit, without any further regard to the rectitude of the plans adopted. But all the dishonest are sooner or later punished by their iniquity. For in the first place, they are acquainted with their own guilt. They know the difference between right and wrong. Although the fraud they practise may be generally practised, they feel self-condemned. They know they are not doing unto others as they would have others do unto them. And consequently they are incessantly tormented by a consciousness of sinful dealing. In the second place, they gradually lose public confidence and eventually its patronage. The laborer may slight his task; he may be altogether an eye servant, and he may imagine his deception is unknown, because his employer has never found fault with his labors. But he may rest assured that his unfaithfulness will be discovered, and his place supplied with another, as soon as circumstances will per-

mit. He will then be discharged in disgrace, and thrown upon society without testimonials of his worth, and therefore the best situations cannot be obtained. The mechanic may slight a piece of work, or the merchant may deceive in the quality or quantity of the goods sold; they may think their profits are great, because they have heard no complaint of the bargains. But the cheated whisper the fact to one neighbor and another; they soon withdraw their custom, and induce others to do the same; so that what was at first considered a lucrative business, eventually proves to be a serious loss. And so in every occupation. Dishonesty is sooner or later detected. And while all honorable men are willing that others should receive fair wages for their labors, and a suitable income from their merchandize, none of the respectable will knowingly encourage dishonest practices. And finally, all this class are sooner or later, disturbed by the compunctions of an accusing conscience. All men have their hours of serious reflection, and no one can review a life of dishonest gain without experiencing the most distressing mental anguish. An example directly to the purpose came to my knowledge a few years since. The individual was past the meridian of life. He lived in an elegant and handsomely furnished dwelling. He was surrounded by extensive and highly cultivated lands. He had money at interest. His family were virtuous and accomplished. An old acquaintance passed a sabbath in his domestic circle; and after a full survey of all his possessions and luxuries, he address-

ed him in the following terms. 'My friend, you have every thing heart can desire; and there seems to be nothing wanting to complete your happiness.' 'O,' said the individual addressed, 'so it may appear to you. But you are greatly mistaken in your estimate. How did I obtain this wealth? Why, I kept a store. I trusted my neighbors to every thing they desired, and especially to large quantities of ardent spirits. I took a mortgage on their several farms for security, and as they could not redeem them at the proper time, I received them into my possession. Several of the original proprietors died in poverty and intemperance. Their families are broken up and scattered. I now look back with pain upon my past conduct. With all my riches I am continually miserable. My conscience is an unceasing tormentor.' Now I have no doubt many others may be found in a similar predicament; and such must ever be the painful consequences of every species of dishonesty. Riches obtained by sinful means can never confer happiness on their possessor. I trust you will all therefore conclude that honesty is the best policy. Be determined then to practise no fraud in your several occupations; and never attempt to increase your property except by honesty.

5. The last method for the sudden acquisition of riches which I shall consider is this; exclusive attention to worldly business. I do not suppose many present are in very great danger of adopting the measures for the sudden acquisition of wealth which I have already described. Neither have I mention-

ed theft, piracy, robbery or murder, because I could not believe any one of this assembly would ever be guilty of such abandoned wickedness. But I do fear that most of us are tempted to pursue the course last noticed. I do think that we are in danger of devoting too exclusive attention to the acquisition of riches, to the fatal neglect of our spiritual interests. We are so constituted that religion is absolutely necessary to our present enjoyment. And if we give our whole souls to the objects of time; if we banish from our hearts all thoughts of our heavenly Father; if we neglect all the peculiar and ennobling duties of the gospel; if we are ignorant of the precepts and consolations of christianity, we do not secure those comforts which are truly essential to our well being and happiness in this world. We may not feel our deficiencies so sensibly in seasons of health and prosperity. But we are in a changing scene. Adversity will come sooner or later. Yea, reproach, and disappointment, and trial, and sickness, and affliction; and in these times of need our earthly treasures cannot yield us the support we desire. And before long we shall all be called to bid farewell to all things below. The want of christian characters, and consolations, and hopes will then occasion the utmost distress. Ministers are not unfrequently obliged to listen to the dying confessions of the worldly minded; confessions which are not imparted even to the nearest friends. And I trust no one will accuse me of betraying the sacredness of our trust, if I disclose a faint view of their last mo-

ments for the special benefit of the living. It is no uncommon occurrence to hear such observations as the following. 'I am in great distress of mind. I have not indeed been guilty of gross immorality or heinous wickedness. I endeavored to make temporal provision for myself and family. I thought the future would afford sufficient time for the peculiar duties of religion. I have accordingly neglected attention to the subject until it is now too late. I sincerely lament my error. I am convinced that I pursued the wrong course. I am destitute of those clear views of the gospel, and those christian affections, and those animating hopes, which now seem necessary to my support and felicity. I now wish, but too vainly wish, I had acquired that strong love for my Father, and that living faith in my Saviour, and that pure and holy character which would prove an anchor to my soul. My usefulness would have been enlarged. My example would have been more worthy of imitation. My enjoyments would have been greater. And my last moments would not have been embittered by these painful remembrances. Gladly would I now give the fruits of all my labors for the christian's condition!' Something of this character is often spoken by those who have made this world their only good. And permit me to assure you all, that such will be your thoughts, and feelings, and words, if you pursue the same irreligious course. How unwise then to neglect the one thing needful for these riches which perish with the using. Seek first the kingdom of

God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Such, my friends, are some of the unlawful methods more commonly adopted for the hasty acquisition of riches. Let our subject then be clearly understood. You are to consider riches as desirable blessings, and to strive lawfully for their acquisition, and to devote them when obtained to the glory of God and the good of mankind. But if you practice any dishonest or unfair acts for their acquisition, or devote your property to sinful purposes, you become exceedingly guilty, and must be sooner of later punished by your iniquities. Seek then for wealth by undeviating honesty, rational economy and persevering industry. And above all, seek diligently for those imperishable riches which will make you happy on earth, and qualify you for endless felicity in heaven.

SERMON XIII.

BENEFIT OF AFFLICTIONS.

PSALMS CXIX. 71. IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED.

We know very little of real grief until we have been called to part with some endeared friend. We may indeed witness the sorrows of our neighbors; we may truly sympathize in their bereavements, and we may conclude we have felt something of the severity of affliction. But when death enters our own doors, and takes from our sight those who have become endeared by all the ties of association and friendship, we discover our mistake. We then experience feelings which never before pained our hearts. We then realize the bitterness of grief, and are almost ready to sink under the burden of our afflictions. But the voice of religion whispers peace and consolation. It teaches us that our trials are ordered in love and designed to benefit our souls. Let us then enquire in what way the loss of friends is calculated to do us good.

1. The loss of friends benefits our souls by reminding us of our dependence on our heavenly Father. When we and our relatives are in health, when our exertions are crowned with desired

success, when the world smiles on our labors, we are prone to forget our dependence on that being who gave us existence and all our powers, who loves us as his offspring with an infinite affection, who has always upheld and supported us in life, who is the author and giver of all our blessings, and who has never forgotten us for a moment. In such seasons of prosperity our thoughts are too apt to be confined to ourselves and our private interests, to the engaging pursuits and concerns of time, to plans and exertions for securing the treasures and honors and enjoyments of this world. And amidst so many present comforts and engagements, so many desired and anticipated pleasures, so many animating hopes and prospects, we become almost wholly unmindful of the original fountain of all our success and happiness.

But when death enters our family circle, and lays prostrate some beloved member, and the anguish of a bereaved heart fills our eyes with tears of sorrow, our minds naturally revert to our ever living and ever present Father, the bestower and destroyer of our comforts, the supreme arbiter of life and death. The distressing event suggests such thoughts and reflections as are calculated to afford us consolation and improvement. We then recollect that our heavenly parent is infinite love, that he regards all his children with paternal tenderness, that he never afflicts in anger or wrath or resentment, but in benevolence and for the best good of all concerned. We also remember that he has been constantly showering the

most necessary, valuable, precious favors upon our unworthy heads. Such reminiscences remind us of our past forgetfulness, ingratitude and disobedience. We sensibly realize that our Father has never forsaken us, though we have been unmindful of his care and blessings. We feel that he has been our unfailing benefactor, though we have rendered no thanksgivings for his unmerited favors. We are conscious that he has been unto us a most tender parent, though we have been disobedient children. We conclude that he has a perfect right to do with us and ours as he pleases, and that he may withdraw our dearest mercies when he sees best for the benefit of all concerned. Such are some of the thoughts concerning our heavenly Father which death naturally suggests to our minds.

Let all the afflicted then cherish these good impressions. Let them influence you to a more perfect imitation of the christian pattern. Resolve to render supreme love to your heavenly Father, who loves you as his offspring, who is daily giving you proofs of his affection, who will ever order the events of your lives in wisdom and goodness, and who will never leave nor forsake those who confide in his perfections. Not only resolve, but enter upon the immediate execution of your resolutions. Let your sincere devotions daily ascend to the throne of heaven from the secret closets of your own minds. Daily meditate on the works of the Almighty around you, and on his character and government. Daily examine the records of his holy will, and carefully com-

pare yourselves with its divine requisitions. Daily endeavor to become perfect even as he is perfect, and thus prove yourselves his obedient children. Do this and the design of providence in the removal of your friends will be answered. For your hearts will be benefitted, your characters will be improved, your happiness will be increased, your preparation for the further trials of this changing scene will be strengthened, you will find by joyful experience that it has been good for you to have been afflicted.

2. The loss of friends benefits our souls by reminding us of our obligations to our Saviour. When the circle of our relatives is unbroken, when neither the decays of nature nor the diseases of death have made inroads upon our constitution, when the world holds out its alluring vanities to our view, we seem to imagine that our companions will always bless our sight, and our health always remain unimpaired, and the world always satisfy our desires. And in accordance with our bright anticipations we proceed to lay our plans for the future, to make our calculations and employ our powers as if this earth were our final home, as if temporal gratifications would always give interest and delight and forever satisfy the cravings of our immortal spirits, as if there were no greater joys than this changing scene offers to our search. And thus we become deeply interested in present objects, and strongly attached to this world's comforts, and forgetful of the claims of Jesus. We seem to expect that the perishing materials around us will yield substantial and permanent felicity, and that the supports of religion will never be needed.

But when our friends are called to bid us farewell, and we follow their mouldering remains to the house appointed for all living, and there see them placed forever beyond the reach of our mortal sight, we are greatly troubled in spirit. We cannot endure the thought of everlasting separation. We cannot bring our feelings to pronounce a final adieu. And in the agony of our grief we enquire, if this is the last we are ever to behold of our departed associates? if it be possible that all the loveliness, and affection, and intelligence of the endeared relative? if it be possible that all which gave interest and worth and beauty to the decaying body, can be confined by the clods of the valley.' In this moment of deep anxiety, of painful doubt, of agonizing fear, the voice of Jesus bursts upon our hearing, I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me shall never die. In my Father's house are many mansions, and where I am there ye shall be also. In such a time of need this gracious friend interposes to relieve our wretchedness, to solve our difficulties, to dissipate our forebodings, to assure us of a future existence beyond the grave, and to confirm us in the animating belief of a happy reunion of all the ransomed of the Lord. Such are some of the thoughts and reflections connected with our Saviour which the death of our friends naturally suggests to our minds.

Cherish these good impressions, all ye afflicted. They will lead you to become better acquainted with the life and instructions and death of the commissioned Jesus. You will turn to the sacred record, and

trace your chosen master from his baptism by John, through a series of labors and trials and sorrows, to his agonizing conflict in the garden. You will follow him from the council chamber of Pilate to the fatal cross, and there behold him deliver up his pure spirit into the hands of his God and Father. You will accompany his lifeless and mangled body to the new stone sepulchre, and there see the tomb secured, not merely by a great rock, but by an invincible Roman soldiery. With the affectionate female disciples you will be at the grave early on the morning of the third day; and you will then feel convinced that the condemned, deserted, crucified son of Mary is really the son of the living God, that death has no power over him, that the Saviour of the world and the pledge of our immortality is indeed risen from the slumbers of the grave. If you then inquire into the cause of this display of divine power and love, you learn that all this has been done for your benefit; to deliver you from ignorance, error, sin and wretchedness. And if your hearts are not harder than the rocks which burst at his crucifixion, you will resolve to render unto him your gratitude for his disinterested sacrifices and services. You will prove yourselves his pupils by receiving him as your infallible teacher, in obeying him as your commissioned master, in imitating him as your exemplar, and by cherishing much of his heavenly temper. If you thus do, the design of the afflictive dispensation will be answered. Your christian faith will be strengthened and purified. Your zeal in the divine life will be

quickened and encouraged. Your hopes of a heavenly inheritance will be elevated and brightened. And your confidence in a happy reunion with your virtuous friends become unshaken and immoveable.

3. The loss of friends benefits our souls by reminding us of the absolute necessity and unspeakable value of religion. There are times when we think too much and too highly of earthly objects, when we look for nothing better or more durable than this world furnishes, when we put far from us the evil day and postpone our attention to duty until a more convenient season. But this delusion may be dissipated at the death bed of our friends. For we there see the vanity, the impotency of all earthly possessions. We there learn that nothing temporal can give peace in a dying hour. Religion is the only thing that can impart calmness, resignation, cheerfulness, and triumphant joy to the departing soul. Yes; a consciousness of having endeavored to live a sober, righteous and godly life; a firm confidence in the love of an ever present and unchangeable Father; an unwavering faith in the blessed promises of Jesus; a cheering assurance of a happy re-union with departed friends, and the sure expectation of a glorious immortality of felicity and improvement; these are the only things which can insure real support and triumphant joy to the dying. When therefore we witness the insufficiency of any temporal gratifications to give the needed assistance to the undying mind, we lose our confidence in this world's gifts. We realize that we can carry none

of them with us. We are satisfied they can afford us no help in the hour of our greatest need. We become sensible that they are deceitful in their promises, transient in their duration, and fading in their nature. From such admonitions of the instability and emptiness of all earthly possessions, we are induced to look in upon ourselves, to inquire if our past lives have been such as to yield us satisfaction in the review, if our present characters are such as to enable us to enter the presence of our Father in joy, if our faith and hope are sufficient to triumph over death and the grave. And as we examine into the past and present state of our hearts, we become conscious of our manifold deficiences. We are convinced that we have omitted many important duties, and committed many serious offences. We then resolve to amend our characters, to be earnestly engaged in the great work of salvation. Such are some of the thoughts which death is calculated to excite in our bosoms.

Let the afflicted cherish these good impressions. Resolve to be more engaged in securing a high degree of christian goodness. Compare yourselves with the example and requisitions of Jesus, and thus learn your deficiencies; what duties you have neglected, what sins committed, what evil habits contracted, what sinful dispositions cherished, what erroneous opinions embraced. Having ascertained your failings, you will look for divine assistance to enable you to cherish pious affections and devout feelings, to subdue and banish undisciplined tempers and passions,

to break off long indulged practices, and to practise long neglected duties. Persevere in this glorious undertaking and success will attend every strenuous effort for self-improvement. And when you have established a christian character, you would not exchange your religious dispositions, principles, habits and hopes for any earthly good. Are not afflictions then well calculated to benefit your souls, to make you wiser, holier and happier?

God grant that these rich and everlasting benefits may result to all the afflicted. And let us all ask if our various bereavements have produced their destined effects upon our character. Have they turned our souls more fully to the love and service of our heavenly Father, to the obedience and imitation of the divine Saviour, and to the practice of pure and undefiled religion? If they have, our characters have been improved and the divine dispensations wisely observed. If they have not, we have probably been driven to greater depravity, by slighting the warnings of Heaven. Be persuaded to reform all deficiencies and imperfections, and ever endeavor to improve all your afflictions to the glory of the Most High.

SERMON XIV.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

AMOS IV. 12.—PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD.

HAVE we any security for our life? If so, in what does it consist? Do any put their trust in youth? Look among your youthful friends. Is not their number diminished? Have you not known one and another, in the bright morning of their days, in the fond anticipation of temporal enjoyment, in the strong love of earthly existence, summoned to the eternal world? And can you trust to that protection which has so often failed your companions? No. In youth there is no security. Do any put their trust in health? You have seen the strength of manhood suddenly prostrated by disease. You have known helpless children early deprived of parental protection. You have known the supporting arm of filial affection taken from trembling old age. You have seen one and another of your associates, in the full bloom of health, in the very maturity of their constitution, in all the engagements of activity, in all the endearments of domestic happiness, summoned to the eternal world. And can you trust to that protection which has so often

failed your acquaintances? No. In health there is no security. Do any put their trust in riches? Can wealth ward off the stroke of accident? Can it purchase exemption from disease? Can it mitigate the pains of sickness? Can you point to the person who has bribed the destroying angel? Have you not known the rich, one and another, with all their means of comfort and happiness, summoned to the eternal world? And can you trust to that protection which has so often failed the affluent? No. In riches there is no security. In what then can we trust? In nothing human; in nothing temporal. We have no security for our life. Whatever may be our age or rank or condition, we are constantly exposed to accident and disease. We are walking on the very brink of the grave, and there may be but a step between us and death. If then, my friends, we are continually exposed to death, is it not wise to be at all times prepared for our departure? Most certainly.

In what does the preparation for death consist?

1. To be always prepared for death, you must ever maintain a correct knowledge of the character of your Creator. This you can obtain from the works of nature, from the deductions of reason, from the events of providence, and from the divine instructions of Jesus. Their united testimony must convince you that he is infinite in all his perfections; infinite in power, in wisdom, in goodness, in mercy, in justice; is infinite love. Add to all these the idea of an ever-present and all-perfect Father, and you

will have some correct notion of his character. Now if you are a parent, you know that you love your children; that no interest is so near your heart as their welfare, and that you would not intentionally do them injury. If you believe the plain instructions of the Saviour, you must also know that your heavenly Father possesses the same kind of love, though infinite in degree, for all his human children; that he has no interest separate from their best spiritual welfare, and that he will never do them injury. For his infinite perfections will always cause him to do right; will ever prevent his doing wrong, and his paternal affection can never be destroyed. If you are children, you know that your parents have always loved you; that they have always designed your good in all their dealings, and that you have nothing to fear from their future conduct towards you. If you believe the plain instructions of Jesus, you must also know that your heavenly Parent has always loved you; that he has always designed your good in all his dispensations, and that you have nothing to fear from his future conduct towards you, because he is infinite and unchangeable Love. If therefore you will bring home to your very soul, all the ennobling truths connected with the idea of an ever-present and all-perfect Father, you have no occasion to fear the approach of death. Living or dying, you are in the arms of a Father. In time or in eternity, you are in the bosom of a Father. His love placed you in this world of probation, and nothing but his love can ever remove you to a state of retribution.

As you cannot live without his constant support, neither can you die without his immediate presence. His paternal care has always been your protection, and this can never be withdrawn. He has created you for happiness, and he will furnish the means for securing your felicity. If you render to him the affection and obedience of children, your happiness will be secured. But if you prove ungrateful and rebellious, your happiness must be lost. Ruin and misery must be your portion. For you are free agents, and can alter your own character and destiny, being aided by the ordinary and promised influences of the divine spirit. But you cannot change the character or laws of your unchangeable Father, who has eternally decreed that sin shall be attended with wretchedness. If then you will always maintain a a correct knowledge of the character of your Creator, and will love and serve and obey him as your ever-present Father, you will be always prepared to meet him in peace and joy.

2. To be always prepared for death, you must ever maintain an unwavering faith in the certainty of a future existence. This faith must rest on evidence, or it will be shaken by the winds of skepticism and infidelity. There is evidence sufficient to establish this certainty. For in its establishment, the character of our heavenly Father is concerned. If you look abroad on the face of the earth, you observe the prevalence of ignorance and vice and misery. You see an unequal distribution of the means of improvement and happiness, of rewards and punish-

ments. Unless there be a future existence, where these evils shall be rectified and these inequalities equalized, can you ascribe justice to the character of your heavenly Father? If you look abroad on the face of the earth, you observe thousands and tens of thousands of infants and children and youth dropping into the grave. You see the largest proportion of human offspring called from earthly hopes before they arrive at years of maturity. Unless there be a future existence where these germs of human intellect will put forth blossoms and yield fruit unto perfection, can you ascribe goodness to the character of your heavenly Father? If you look abroad on the face of the earth, you observe the wonderful achievements of the human mind, the discoveries of science and the inventions of genius, the plans of benevolence and the aspirations of piety. Unless there be a future existence where such unearthly, spiritual faculties will be permitted to gratify their longings for immortality, and even ripen in the sunshine of eternity, can you ascribe wisdom to the character of your heavenly Father? If you look abroad on the face of the earth, you perceive that the strong ties of friendship and love are often severed. You see the tears of the parent and the child, the husband and wife, the brother and sister, the lover and friend, watering the new made graves of their departed relatives. Unless there is a future existence where these severed ties of virtuous affection will be again united in undecaying friendship, can you ascribe love to your heavenly Father? If

then our heavenly Father is infinite love; infinite in wisdom and goodness and justice, then will the children of his affection survive the dissolution of their frail, material bodies, and be blessed with a spiritual immortality. Not only so. The resurrection of Jesus is attested by the most satisfactory evidence. The more it is examined, the deeper will be your convictions of this fundamental truth. And if Jesus lives, his gospel is true. We shall all live again. This mortal must put on immortality. There is then no uncertainty, no cause for doubt, on this momentous subject. And if we let our belief in this animating, this purifying truth, exert its proper influence on our hearts and lives and hopes, we shall be at all times prepared to meet our God in peace and joy.

3. To be always prepared for death, you must ever possess the necessary qualifications for heavenly happiness. These you can all secure by your own exertions, and with the promised assistance of your Father's spirit. For they do not consist in the belief of any mysterious or unintelligible doctrines, because we cannot believe what we do not understand. The fundamental principles of christianity are few, simple and intelligible. The paternal character of our Creator, the messiahship of Jesus, the consequent divinity of his religion, the necessity of moral goodness and the certainty of a future life of righteous retributions, constitute the essential doctrines of the gospel. But a belief in these or in any other truths will be of no avail, unless it leads

to the acquisition of christian holiness, which is the necessary qualification for heavenly happiness. You will therefore exhibit the fruits of your religious belief in your daily and hourly temper and conversation and conduct. You will love and serve your heavenly Father, because this is necessary for your present happiness; and when you enter the other world, you will still have the same Father to love and adore; you will be still dependent on his parental care, and your happiness will still depend on your piety. You will also love and serve your fellow men, because this is necessary for your present happiness; and when you enter the other world, you will still have fellow beings to love and assist; you will still be dependent on their fraternal regard, and your happiness will still depend on your benevolence. You will likewise cultivate meekness, humility, charity, all the christian graces and virtues, because they are necessary to your present happiness; and when you enter the other world, you will carry with you all your moral treasures; they will still constitute your spiritual riches, and your happiness will still depend on your christian acquirements. You will, moreover, love and obey your once crucified Saviour, because this is now necessary to purify your souls from sin; and when you enter the other world, you will still have the same Lord to reverence and obey until he delivers up the kingdom to his Father; you will still have the same soul to preserve pure; and your heaven will continue so long as your purity continues. In short, you will endeavor to be practical christians;

christians in your faith and temper and conduct; always endeavoring to do what you believe to be right; ever striving to avoid what you think to be wrong. And you will seek for high degrees of mental cultivation and moral purity, realizing that you are acquiring an education for a higher sphere of intelligence and duty and felicity. Thus will you be qualified for heavenly happiness, and consequently prepared to meet your God in glory.

4. To be always prepared for death, you must ever cherish correct views on the subject of death itself. Many persons suppose there is great pain and agony in the act of dying. This is not generally the case. The severity of suffering is usually experienced during sickness. We have reason to believe that the great majority drop into eternity with as little bodily pain as they fall asleep. We know indeed that there are instances in which the patient is called to endure much. But such examples are comparatively rare, and such sufferings comparatively momentary. The unhappy death bed is caused by the severe compunctions of an accusing conscience. And it is not a belief or disbelief in any religious creed, which can mitigate and destroy these sufferings. Those religious opinions which give support and consolation in death, are more or less common to all believers. There have been happy death beds in all denominations, because all have contained good christians, and not because all have embraced the whole truth of the gospel. And there have been unhappy death beds in all denominations, because

all have included some immoral and hypocritical members, and not because all have received some speculative errors. All Christians may embrace enough truth to neutralize the effects of error, and produce virtuous dispositions and actions; and it is these which give support and comfort in a dying hour. And without a christian faith and character, it is not in the power of any true or false opinions to yield the awakened, unreformed, dying sinner, peace and joy. For he has an accuser in his own bosom whom he cannot silence or deny. He is conscious of having knowingly done wickedly, and of having wilfully refused to do righteously. The pain of dying therefore, so far as the mind, the conscience, is concerned, is to be avoided by living soberly and righteously and godly. For what does the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God? And as to bodily pains, it is unchristian to fear them; for they are seldom experienced in the last moments, and by fearing them we show a practical distrust of the goodness of our Father, who will be our stay and comfort in the trying hour of nature's dissolution. If you thus preserve a conscience void of offence both towards man and God, and cherish correct views on the subject of death itself, you will be always prepared to meet your Maker.

If then you are always prepared for death, you will also be prepared for life. Habitually realizing that your Creator is your unchangeable and loving Father, you will always avoid that slavish fear which is

is ever productive of misery; and cherish that filial love which is always productive of happiness. Habitually realizing the certainty of a future existence, you will always avoid that strong attachment to things temporal, and that excessive worldly anxiety, which are ever productive of misery; and cherish that trust in God, and that spiritual mindedness which are always productive of happiness. Habitually realizing that holiness is the necessary qualification for heavenly happiness, you will always avoid that sinful pollution, which is ever productive of happiness; and exercise that living faith in Jesus which purifies the heart, and is always productive of happiness. Habitually realizing that your heavenly Father will be with you in the hour of death, you will always banish those indefinite fears and terrors, which are ever productive of misery; and cherish those rational, christian views, which are always productive of happiness. If your preparation for death produces these fruits, you will always be prepared for the true enjoyment of life. And unless you are thus prepared to die, you are unprepared to live in this dying world. And unless you are thus prepared to live, you are unprepared to die the death of the righteous.

But this is not all. If you are thus prepared either to live or die, you are also prepared for the death of your friends. I do not say that we shall remain unmoved when they are taken from our sight. To us their departure will be sudden. Whether they are carried off by accident, or lingering disease, to us their departure will be sudden. For in the

bosom of friendship, there is always hope so long as there is life, and the sudden destruction of hope will ever produce grief. And when we behold the friend we have loved as our own soul, pale and lifeless; the eye of intelligence closed in the sleep of death; the voice of music silent as the grave; and all that excited interest and gave beauty and loveliness and worth, forever departed from our mortal sight, we cannot contain our grief. The tears of affection will flow. We cannot restrain them if we would; we would not if we could. They are the fruits of virtuous sensibility. Jesus wept. But when the agonized heart has given vent to its natural emotions, when the agitated feelings are calmed, and when sobered reason resumes its office, we experience the rich benefits of our preparation. The divine consolations of our holy religion will take possession of our souls. And we shall show by our christian composure, our cheerful resignation, our living faith, our animating hope, that we are ever prepared, in some humble degree, for the death of our friends.

And, finally, we shall be prepared for the trying moment of our own dissolution. I do not say that we shall be unaffected at the approach of death. The strong ties of sympathy and affection are to be dissolved. We are to bid farewell to the friends we have loved, to the duties we have performed, to the hopes we have cherished, to the books we have read, to the place in which we have lived, to all the endearing objects and pursuits and associations of time. And all this we cannot do without a struggle of hu-

manity. Neither can we look forward into futurity without apprehension. We have no certain knowledge of the regions and scenes upon which we are to enter. No traveller has returned with the desired information. All is rendered fearful by a consciousness of our manifold imperfections and failings. And then hastens the trying moment of separation. The blood seems collecting at the heart. The light of day vanishes. The last grasp of affection is returned. And there is a feeling of loneliness which made even the divine Jesus exclaim, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? But the agony is soon passed. The light of the gospel illumines the darkened mind. The certainty of a heavenly inheritance is like an anchor to the soul. The realities of eternity burst on the enraptured vision. Faith reigns triumphant. There is no fear of annihilation; no fear of an angry God; no fear of death; but a firm confidence in the love of an ever present and unchangeable Father, acquired by a life of christian faith and practice.

SERMON XV.

CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

ISAIAH III. 10. SAY YE TO THE RIGHTEOUS THAT IT SHALL BE WELL WITH THEM; FOR THEY SHALL EAT THE FRUIT OF THEIR OWN DOINGS.

YOUR attention is requested to some remarks on the character and condition of the righteous. The scriptures of truth will be my principal guide in the present inquiry. I acknowledge no other infallible authority. And by their decision I shall fearlessly abide.

I. Who are the scripturally righteous?

1. Those are righteous who exercise unfeigned repentance towards God, and a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the appointed process by which to attain scriptural righteousness. And blessed be God that he is willing to consider us holy, willing to secure to us the joys of earth and the blessings of heaven, on such merciful conditions. Merciful, I repeat. For after all our sincere exertions in the path of duty, we are still unprofitable children and disobedient servants. We go astray

from earliest youth. Our appetites and passions rebel against reason and conscience. We forget the God who made and supports us. We neglect the Saviour who died to redeem us. His divine instructions and spotless example do not secure our attention and imitation. The fugitive pleasures of life allure us from the straight and narrow path of duty. Our moral principles are weakened by worldly pursuits and enjoyments. Our pious and devotional feelings become cold and languid. Our good resolutions yield to the strong power of temptation. Our thoughts and affections cling too strongly to earthly objects. Our best deeds are influenced by unhallowed motives. Our most ardent aspirations are too much polluted with sensual feelings. Our violations of the laws of conscience and of our Maker are innumerable. Sensible of so many defects, so many imperfections, so many sins of omission and commission, how can we expect to appear innocent in the sight of Heaven? We cannot. But our Father has assured us of his willingness to accept our sincere endeavors and our imperfect obedience. He is willing to consider us righteous upon condition of our genuine repentance, our unfeigned faith, our sober, righteous and godly life. This is the only righteousness we are capable of attaining; the only righteousness required of imperfect creatures; the only righteousness preached by Christ and his apostles. For the most powerful of the number sums up his instructions in these words: I have kept back nothing that was profitable for you, but have showed

you and taught you from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. What are the evidences of a living faith and a sincere repentance? What are the fruits by which the righteous are to be known? The first trait in their character is the love of their heavenly Father. And if you are of this happy number, my friends, this affection will dwell in your hearts. It will constitute the foundation of your christian character. It will be the ruling and governing principle of your conduct. It will influence you to approach the throne of grace habitually, with a holy reverential fear and filial confidence; and cause the acceptable incense of spiritual devotion to ascend at all times from the consecrated altars of your souls. It will awaken the glow of gratitude for all your manifold blessings. And should clouds and darkness sometimes surround his throne, should sorrow and affliction press heavily on your hearts, in him will ever be your hope and confidence. You will pour the bitterness of your sufferings into his bosom. You will receive all his dispensations with filial submission. You will be cheerfully resigned to his unerring will. You will be always obedient to his wise and beneficial commands. In all things you will commit yourselves to his guidance and fatherly protection. For your love to him will be supreme.

3. Another conspicuous trait in the character of the righteous is their regard for their Lord and master Jesus Christ. If you are of this happy number,

my friends, you will prove yourselves his disciples, by making him your only infallible teacher in matters of religion; by receiving his instructions as eternal truth; by making his gospel the sole guide of your christian faith and practice; by contemplating his perfect character and imitating his spotless example; by imbibing much of his heavenly spirit; by submitting yourselves to his authority; by trusting to his promises for eternal life; by embracing him as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world; by confiding in him as your redeemer from all iniquity; by rendering him the heart-felt tribute of gratitude, veneration and love, and by confessing him before men in his appointed ordinance.

4. Love to mankind is another reigning principle in the hearts of the righteous. If you are of this happy number, my friends, you will learn from your heaven-taught teacher, that God is the impartial Father of the whole human family, and that all mankind are brethren. As such you will ever endeavor to regard them. You will always aim to do unto them, in your motives, thoughts, feelings, conversation and conduct, as you would wish them to do unto you in an exchange of circumstances. You will be kind to all with whom you have any connexion. You will be benevolent to the destitute so far as circumstances permit and occasions require. You will be charitable to all who may differ from you either in opinion or practice. You will be forgiving to all who have insulted or injured you. You will not be easily provoked by the petty conflicts of interest or

opinion. You will not be oppressive to the needy, or those under obligations. You will not be elated with vanity or pride. You will not be censorious, but clothed in the becoming garb of humility. The fruits of the spirit, which are peace, joy, love, long suffering, gentleness, fidelity, meekness and temperance, will shine most conspicuously in all your dealings and intercourse with your fellow creatures.

5. The righteous are careful and solicitous to cultivate and cherish and increase this love for God and Christ and man, and at the same time to maintain a proper distrust of themselves. If you are of this happy number, my friends, you will strive after these all-important christian graces and virtues. You will use all divinely appointed means of moral improvement. You will prayerfully and perseveringly study the sacred scriptures. You will observe all gospel institutions and ordinances. You will scrupulously practise every exercise of faith and piety. Especially will you ever maintain a proper distrust of yourselves, a sense of your own unworthiness, a true spirit of humility, so that no spiritual pride or self-righteousness or exclusiveness may ever find a residence in your bosoms. In short, piety to God, benevolence to man, love and obedience to Jesus, and self-distrust, humility, self-cultivation and self-discipline, will be the commanding features, the leading principles of your characters. These are the fruits of your faith and repentance. And these will render you righteous in the scriptural sense. God grant that you may all have the testimony of your conscience that you belong to this number.

II. Why shall it be well with the righteous? Because they shall eat the fruit of their own doings. What are these fruits, and when are they enjoyed?

1. It is well with the righteous in life, because they are rewarded with real peace of mind. The apostle assures us that every soul who worketh good shall receive glory, honor, *peace*. This declaration is verified by abundant experience. And from what does that peace of the Christian arise? From his rational belief in the existence of an ever-present and all-perfect Father; from an experimental acquaintance with the divine religion of Jesus; from a consciousness of having sincerely endeavored to obey the dictates of reason and conscience and revelation; and from a firm and unshaken confidence in the mercy and love of the infinite Parent. These are the only solid grounds for true peace of mind; and these belong to the pure and righteous.

It is also well with the righteous in life, because their faith in Jesus is unwavering. They believe their redeemer liveth. They know in whom they have trusted. And though he has gone to prepare mansions in his Father's house for their reception, yet his instructions, his consolations, his perfect example are left for their contemplation, comfort and guidance. These afford them that pure, elevated, refined enjoyment which the world can neither furnish nor destroy. And they feel assured that when a few more changing seasons shall have come and departed, and a few more hours of pain and sorrow and disappointment and suffering shall have passed,

their warfare will be accomplished, the crown of victory will be received, a heavenly inheritance will be entered, and they shall be with their glorified master in realms of bliss.

It is likewise well with the righteous in life, because their progress in goodness is ever attended with present happiness. For the object of religious culture is to cleanse the heart from all earth-born propensities and affections, and to implant and nourish the graces and virtues of a heavenly origin. And every moral and christian exercise in which we engage has a direct tendency to accomplish this purpose, and at the same time to produce rational satisfaction. Yes; every prayer uttered in sincerity renders the duty less difficult and more delightful, fortifies the mind against temptation and sin, and fills the soul with a holy and tranquil joy. Every act of obedience to the divine will renders the performance of others more easy, secures the approbation of conscience, and produces a happy elevation of feeling, resulting from a sense of the divine approbation. Every moment devoted to serious meditation on the example and character of Jesus, on the unspeakable blessings of his heavenly mission, and on the sublime discoveries of his pure gospel, is followed by unalloyed happiness. Every deed of kindness and charity returns an immediate reward. Every exercise of benevolent feelings, forgiveness of injuries, and genuine humility is productive of satisfaction. Every spirited effort to govern a vicious propensity or an unhallowed appetite, to banish

sinful thought or subdue an inordinate affection, to conquer a rebellious passion or extirpate an evil habit, renders the recurrence of such plagues less frequent, makes the complete expulsion of them less difficult, leaves the soul less sinful and polluted, gives room for the growth of christian graces, and produces present comfort. Now the happiness which arises from the discharge of these various duties is of a positive character; such as can be felt and defined; and such as will never forsake the righteous under any earthly troubles. For should temptations assail, and friends prove false, and temporal blessings be destroyed, and earthly hopes be blasted, still they would feel happy in the testimony of their own conscience, in the moral purity of their hearts and lives, in the promises of the blessed gospel, in their living faith in Jesus, and in their firm and unshaken confidence in an ever-present and all-perfect Father.

2. It is well with the righteous in death, because they can review their past lives with satisfaction. They can look back on many tokens of divine love and mercy; on many precious seasons of communion with their heavenly Father; on many refreshing feasts at the table of their chosen and revered master; on many deeds of kindness and benevolence; on many successful struggles against temptation and sin; on many hours' resigned submission to the divine will. They do not indeed expect to merit heaven on account of these services. For after all their struggles against wickedness, and all

their exertions after obedience, they feel themselves to have been unprofitable servants. But they do look upon the past mercies of God as pledges of his future love. They do look upon their labors in the cause of goodness as the means which have greatly contributed to the purification of their souls. They do look upon their moral purity and holiness as the necessary qualifications for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness. And they also look to the infinite mercy and unchangable love of their all-perfect Father for the gift of eternal life. Thus is it well with the righteous because a review of their past life affords them satisfaction.

It is also well with the righteous in death, because the prospect before them is bright and joyful and animating. The light of the gospel has dispelled the darkness of the grave. The approach of dissolution brings with it no terrors. They are supported and elevated by christian faith and hope and consolation. No vain regrets for the unsatisfying pursuits and pleasures of time escape their lips. They have long seen as through a glass, darkly. They will soon see their Saviour and the redeemed face to face. With a heavenly composure they bid adieu to weeping friends; and in the language of inspiration exclaim, I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness in that world to which I haste. And now, O Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit. Without a groan, *without a sigh*, their souls take the invisible

flight to the spiritual world, even to the bosom of that Parent from whom they proceeded. Their departure was mild and tranquil like the setting of a summer's sun, and on the countenances of the lifeless clay are impressed the beauty and loveliness of death, strongly indicating the happiness of the departed.

3. It is well with the righteous in the other world, for they enter a state for which they are prepared. And my friends, if you are of this happy number you will enter an incorruptible state, where all tears shall be wiped away; and where no sin, nor suffering, nor death can ever come. You will enter a social state, where the society will consist of a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues; where long separated friends shall unite in undecaying friendship; where an innumerable company of angels will be assembled; where Jesus shall be glorified in his saints; and where God himself unveils the brightness of his glory and the heaven of his presence. You will enter an active state, where employments, delightful and sublime, will occupy the unwearied hours; where devotions, pure and holy, shall joyfully ascend from pious hearts; where all desires for knowledge will be gratified; and where the soul shall forever increase in wisdom, and goodness, and felicity. You will enter an eternal state; a state that shall never end; no, never. If for a moment you should pause from your heavenly employments, and make the enquiry, What is the hour? Eternity

—would burst upon your hearing from the voices of ten thousand times ten thousand of the redeemed. And after millions of millions of ages of bliss shall have rolled away, should you again ask the question, What is the hour? Eternity—would again reecho through the immeasurable vaults of heaven. Yes, a state eternal as the eternal God. As your Saviour, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, so do ye be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life.

SERMON XVI.

CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE WICKED.

ISAIAH III. 11. WOE UNTO THE WICKED! IT SHALL BE ILL WITH HIM; FOR THE REWARD OF HIS HAND SHALL BE GIVEN HIM.

YOUR attention is requested to some remarks on the character and condition of the wicked. The gospel of Jesus furnishes the only sure test of moral goodness. My present enquiry will therefore be guided by the decisions of this infallible standard. For by this must our characters be judged and rewarded both now and hereafter.

I. Who are the scripturally wicked?

1. Those are wicked who live under the prevailing influence of sin in their hearts. The word heart is frequently used to denote the whole intellectual and moral man, the reason and understanding, the affections and dispositions, the will and imagination. In this sense it may be considered the grand fountain of all our motives and thoughts, desires and tempers, words and actions. It is with the heart thus defined that we love either our Creator or the creatures of his hand. It is capable of loving both, for both are *possessed* of lovely qualities; but both cannot be

loved in equal degrees at the same time. One or the other, the love of Deity, or the love of the world, must predominate. Can ye serve God and mammon? It is also with the heart that we believe in Jesus unto righteousness. And it is the evil heart of unbelief that inclines us to depart from the living waters of salvation. Belief and unbelief on the same important questions of religion cannot exist in equal degrees in the same heart, at the same moment. One or the other must predominate. What concord has Christ with belial? There is likewise a pure, contrite, humble heart, from which proceed all good desires and dispositions and behavior. And there is the polluted heart, from which proceed evil thoughts, murders, and every sensual and malignant passion. Purity and pollution cannot both exist in equal degrees in the same heart, at the same period. One or the other must predominate. What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? It is moreover from the good treasure of his heart that the good man brings forth good things. And from the evil treasure of his heart that the evil man brings forth evil things. Equal quantities of both good and evil cannot proceed from the same heart at the same time. One or the other must predominate. Can a fountain send forth at the same instant fresh water and salt? Or can a pure fountain send forth bitter waters? or a corrupt fountain sweet waters?

From these scriptural allusions, you plainly perceive that the heart of man is the source of good conduct when under the influence of good motives

and principles. You also notice that it is the source of evil conduct when under the influence of sensual and wicked principles. This conclusion is confirmed by the testimony of experience and observation. And from these three sources of evidence, you must also be fully convinced that the human heart cannot in this world be wholly under the influence of either good or bad sentiments; can neither be wholly bad, totally depraved; nor wholly good, entirely pure and sinless. Neither can it remain in a state of perfect neutrality. Good or bad dispositions must rule. Those which have the ascendency determine the character, either as righteous or wicked. If then you do not prevailingly and habitually love your heavenly Father and your fellow men; if you do not prevailingly and habitually believe on the Lord Jesus and submit yourselves to his authority; if you do not prevailingly and habitually bring forth the good fruits of a sober, righteous and godly life, your heart is under the prevailing influence of sin; and consequently you are wicked in the scriptural sense of the term.

Now this general description includes every individual of the wicked. But the heart of man is wisely concealed from human observation. It is the prerogative of an omnicient God alone to know its true state. It is, however, the grand fountain from which issue the various streams of conduct. It is the living tree which yields all the actions of life. And can a good tree bring forth corrupt fruit; or a corrupt tree produce good fruit? No. Neither can

a man whose heart is prevailingly under the influence of sin exhibit good moral conduct; nor can a man whose heart is prevailingly under the dominion of good motives and principles manifest a bad moral character. Hence our blessed Saviour has given us a rule by which to form our judgment of our fellow men. By their fruits shall ye know them. Following this divine direction, I must declare,—

2. That the openly immoral are wicked in a scriptural sense. Those are immoral who knowingly disobey the christian commands; and openly immoral when their disobedience comes within the notice of their fellow men. And is not this class numerous?

Are there not many who habitually and intentionally profane the holy name of their Maker? Is this dreadful impiety confined to any particular age or rank in society? Do we not hear it from the imitative child and the hoary-headed sinner? from the beggar at your door and the libertine who riots in luxury? from the thoughtless mariner and the military chieftain? from the foolish bravado and the shameless female? Is it not truly astonishing that any persons who wish to be ranked among rational beings should deliberately indulge in a practice so unmeaning and useless in itself? so low and degrading in the estimation of all good society? so shocking to the purest and best feelings of humanity? so expressly forbidden by the Saviour of the world? so pernicious in its influence upon the character? and so sinful in the sight of God that he has expressly

assured us he will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain?

Are there not also many who habitually and intentionally disregard the christian sabbath? How many methods do such persons contrive to misspend the precious season which God has so kindly set apart for their spiritual improvement? They pass this sacred time either in sleep or idleness; either in visiting friends or adjusting accounts; either in frivolous and unimproving conversation or the perusal of light and irreligious books; either in the inordinate gratification of sensual appetites or the indulgence of forbidden pleasures. Is it not truly lamentable that so many are blind to their own best interests? that so many in our highly favored land should neglect this happy day of rest and religious worship, instruction and improvement; and thus bring upon themselves ignorance and misery by not remembering the sabbath to keep it holy?

Are there not those likewise who bear false witness against their neighbors? This includes not merely those guilty of perjury, but also the slanderer and the liar. I do not suppose there are many who would testify falsely when under oath, but I do believe the number is not small of those whose lips speak guile; who are not religiously scrupulous about the truth; who do not pay a tender regard to the reputation of others. And does not this disregard of truth and justice argue a bad state of the heart? Can he love his neighbor as himself who endeavors to injure their influence or feelings or character, by

circulating false reports concerning their motives or principles or conduct? And if he loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

Moreover, are not our hearts often pained by the sight of intemperance? Are not her victims numerous and strongly marked? Are they not found in both sexes, in all ranks, and among all ages? Are they not guilty of a species of suicide? The means adopted may not always effect their destruction so suddenly as the more violent measures sometimes pursued, but their fatal operation is no less certain. Is it not truly alarming that so many are giving themselves up to this ruinous and beastly practice? and destroying their own usefulness and happiness as well as the comfort and security of their connexions? To this black catalogue I might add many more of a more aggravated description, such as the thief, the swindler, the gamester, the adulterer, the fornicator, the robber and the murderer. All these and many others, being openly immoral, must be wicked in a scriptural sense.

3. Whoever lives in the habitual practice of known sin, or in the habitual neglect of known duty, is wicked in a scriptural sense. Our religion requires an unreserved surrender of the heart, and an earnest endeavor to practise thorough obedience. We may perform many of the duties of morality and piety, and preserve a fair name in the world; but at the same time regularly indulge in some known favorite sin, or neglect some known unpleasant duty. We

may break off those pursuits and habits which require no great efforts to give up, and assume so much of the garb of religion as will secure our christian reputation. But such obedience is insincere and cannot receive the divine acceptance. The whole heart must be given to duty. We must endeavor to forsake and avoid every thing we know to be wrong, and pursue and practise every thing we believe to be right. For to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him this omission is sinful. Thus have I shown that the scripturally wicked are those who live under the prevailing influence of sin in their hearts, who are openly immoral in their conduct, who habitually practise some known iniquity or neglect some known duty.

II. Why shall it be ill with the wicked? Because the reward of their hands shall be given them. What is this reward, and when shall it be received?

1. It is ill with the wicked in life, because they can possess no real peace of mind. There is no peace to the wicked. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. Not only Scripture but experience and observation instruct us that the disobedient seldom or never possess any true peace of mind. We are so constituted that wickedness is ever attended or followed by misery. Our misery is caused in part by the severe compunctions of an accusing conscience, that faithful monitor which divine wisdom has placed within us for wise and holy purposes; and which ever reminds us of our

deviations from the path of duty, unless seared by a long course of sin and irreligion; and whose remonstrances are generally proportioned to our various degrees of moral sensibility and sinful pollution. Some of the most abandoned have been hurried to self-destruction by its overpowering warnings; and every class of the vicious are greatly disturbed at times by its searching and silent admonitions.

It is also ill with the wicked in life, because their sins frequently produce actual and visible wretchedness. Take the victim of intemperance. His iniquity produces sickness and disease, peevishness and painfulness, hardness of heart and blindness of mind, mental weakness and imbecility, quarrelling and accidents, poverty and disorder, and an enormous train of evils which I need not enumerate. The same may be said of many other kinds of wickedness. The gamester loses his temper and his property, becomes profane and intemperate, is degraded and despised. The wicked generally reap the fruits of their own labor in some punishment which is the necessary consequence of their transgressions.

It is likewise ill with the wicked, because they have made no preparation for the trials of this mortal life. Religion can give them no consolation. For they have been so exclusively devoted to this world that the love of God has never found admission to their hearts. They have been so engrossed by earthly objects and pursuits as never to have attuned their minds to spiritual devotion. And when the hour

of affliction approaches, their habits of thinking and feeling and acting cannot be suddenly changed. Consequently they can derive little or no comfort from spiritual resources. And the world which they have worshipped has no sources of support and consolation for the sorrowful. It is therefore ill with the wicked in life, because their peace of mind is destroyed, their bodies and souls tormented by their sinfulness, and the consolations of religion are taken from them in seasons of suffering.

2. It is ill with the wicked in the hour of death, because their misery is increased by a review of their past lives. When they look back, a picture of base ingratitude stares them in the face. They see mercies abused, and privileges disregarded, and iniquity committed. The invitations of a merciful Father have been slighted. The kind entreaties of a crucified Saviour have been despised. The strivings of the divine spirit have been resisted. The warnings of providence have been unimproved. The exercises of the sabbath have been neglected. The scriptures have been unstudied. And then perhaps will press upon the agitated soul, the recollection of appetites exclusively indulged, and affections perverted, and promises broken, and confidence betrayed, and enmities indulged, and cruelties practised, and duties disregarded, and life misspent. Harrowed up by such remembrances, the bible brings no comfort, for they know nothing of its contents. The Saviour presents no attractions, for they have crucified him afresh by a life of *disobedience*.

It is also ill with the wicked in the hour of death, because the prospect before them is dark and hopeless. They have made no proper preparation for this mortal conflict. The blessed gospel has shed for them but few rays of heavenly light on the dark valley of the shadow of death. They have secured no friends, laid up no imperishable treasures in the world to which they are soon going. The hopes of the hypocrite which they have cherished are now passing away. Thus deserted by friendly hope, their minds are occupied by a fearful looking for of judgment and righteous indignation. At such a moment will the recollection of earthly friends, or riches amassed, or flatteries received, or learning acquired, or pleasures experienced, calm their troubled spirits? O no. Nothing but the remembrance of a well spent life, the approbation of conscience, the religion of the gospel can impart peace and hope to the departing soul. These the wicked have not; and with many compunctions of mind, and many pangs of remorse, and many appalling anticipations of the future, they enter that untried state, where God will render unto every man according to his deeds. Thus it is ill with the wicked in death, because their review of the past and their anticipations of the future give them pain and misery.

3. It is ill with the wicked in the other world, because they are not qualified for heavenly happiness. And what punishment more severe need we imagine, than for them to enter the spiritual existence

without any vital principles of religion, or any good degree of benevolence, or any holy affections, or any pious dispositions? What punishment more severe need we imagine, than for them to be admitted into that innumerable company of ransomed souls, in whose blissful employment they are not prepared to engage, in whose purest joys they are not fitted to sympathize, and in whose spiritual devotions they are not qualified to participate? What punishment more severe need we imagine, than for them to meet that glorified Saviour whom they have never cordially received, whose merciful invitations they have wilfully slighted, and whose salutary instructions they have practically despised? What punishment more severe need we imagine, than for them to approach the more immediate presence of that merciful Father whom they have never sincerely loved, or cheerfully obeyed, or truly worshipped? Now this is the lightest punishment that the wicked can possibly receive; and is not this most alarming? Is it not then ill with the wicked in life and death and eternity? And will you not all avoid wickedness? O yes; as you value the happiness of this life and the next, as you value the love of your Saviour and your Father, you will strive to be ranked among the righteous.

SERMON XVII.

LOVE TO ENEMIES.

MATTHEW V. 44. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES.

THESE are the words of our Saviour. He was surrounded by enemies. They contradicted the truth of his declarations. They perverted the meaning of his instructions. They misrepresented the motives of his conduct. They denounced him as a malefactor. They attributed his miracles to diabolical agency. They bribed one of his corrupt disciples to betray him into their hands. They brought against him false accusations. They pronounced an unjust sentence of condemnation. They nailed him to the accursed cross between two thieves. From the hour he entered on his public ministry to the moment of his ignominious death, he was exposed to the hatred and malignity and persecution of real enemies. But notwithstanding all their wickedness, he ever manifested towards them a God-like disposition. He always desired and aimed to promote their best welfare. He constantly labored to render them wise and good and happy. He even loved them as children *of his heavenly* Father, and explicitly commanded

his disciples to exercise the same affection. All this you well know. But do you also know that this command was likewise intended for your obedience? Do you also recollect that this heavenly example was left for your imitation? Do you fully realize that unless you endeavor to conform to this precept, and to copy this pattern, you are destitute of at least a portion of the christian spirit and character.

Now, my friends, I do not suppose an individual present is a real enemy to any human being. I do not believe an individual present is exposed to the hatred of one real enemy. But I do suppose, I do verily believe, there may be several persons present who are more or less unfriendly to some one or more of their fellow mortals. I do also suppose, I do also verily believe, that most of us may be exposed to the ill will of more or fewer of our neighbors and acquaintances. And I am not at all surprised that this should be the fact. For we have come into this village from several different directions. We are comparatively strangers to each other's true characters. We are differently constituted and differently educated. We entertain different sentiments, and are pursuing different interests. We are all seeking our own welfare which may frequently appear to interfere with the prosperity of others. We quickly notice the failings of others, and readily make them the subject of our conversation. In some one or more of these ways, our dislikes are produced. We think *others* have slighted or injured us, and others

believe we have slighted or injured them. Those of whom we think or speak evil, or to whom we offer an apparent or real insult, call us their enemies; and those who think or speak evil of us, or do us an apparent or real injury, we call our enemies. Such enmities disturb the peace and harmony and happiness of individuals, families, neighborhoods, societies and towns; and as they arise from a disregard of our Saviour's precepts and example, I would ask your attention to the subject of my text.

I. What then is implied in loving our enemies?

1. Would you love your enemies in the sense required, you must cultivate and exercise toward them feelings similar to those which our heavenly Father cherishes towards all his sinful children. And what are these? Let me explain. He knows perfectly all our weakness, all our imperfections all our wickedness. He knows our disobedience of his benevolent commands, and our forgetfulness of his manifold favors. He knows our misimprovement of his various blessings, and our stubborn opposition to his rightful authority. All this you will admit. Still he feels towards us no ill will, no anger, no resentment, no wrath, no revenge. He ever manifests the kindest dispositions. He does all that can be done in consistency with our moral freedom for our real happiness. He designs no injury, nothing but good in all his dispensations. All this you will also acknowledge. Yet he disap-

proves of our iniquity. He punishes our transgressions. He intends his discipline for our reformation and improvement. All his dealings are directly calculated to benefit our characters, and increase our felicity. Such then are the feelings of our heavenly Father towards all his dependent, imperfect, rebellious offspring, if we may believe the testimony of nature and reason and conscience and experience and revelation.

Such then should be your spirit towards your enemies. You may ascertain their true characters. You may discover their depravity. You may obtain evidence of their hatred. You need not approve of anything which is the least unchristian in their motives, or tempers, or words, or actions. You need not esteem their licentiousness, or unkindness, or uncharitableness. But you must abstain from any ill will or anger or revenge on account of these forbidding qualities. And not only so. Let them injure your feelings, your influence or your interest; let them misrepresent your motives, your principles or your conduct; let them defame your characters, blast your happiness or destroy your peace; let them do what they may; you must not retaliate. You must never return evil for evil. You must do nothing but what is right and christian. But justice and religion permit you to expose their iniquities, as our Saviour did those of the self-righteous hypocrites. You may acquaint them and the world with their offences against morality and charity and holiness. You may prosecute them

in the civil law, if a regard to your reputation, usefulness or safety requires such a process. You may avoid their society and influence whenever they are likely to prove injurious or dangerous. All this and much more you may lawfully and innocently perform. But in no case is it allowable to do any thing which you believe to be wrong either in thought or feeling or action. You should always wish them well. You should endeavor to do them good so far as your circumstances and opportunities permit. In one word, you should strive, at all times and under all circumstances, to make them wiser and better and happier. You will thus prove yourselves the obedient children of your kind Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

2. But can I really love a vicious character? Suppose for example a person should pretend to be my friend. Suppose I regard him as a man of sound principles, pure morals, good dispositions and virtuous character. Suppose I love him for these imagined excellencies and place confidence in his fancied integrity. And after all this, suppose I should find myself grossly mistaken in the individual. Suppose he should prove to be a hypocrite, and manifest his enmity by revealing my secrets, misrepresenting my conversation, slandering my character. Now could I love this person as well after my discovery of his treachery, as when I considered him my trustworthy friend and companion? By no means.

Nothing of the kind is possible, and nothing of this sort is required either by reason or revelation. For the qualities which I supposed he possessed and which secured my esteem are wanting; and there is nothing left on which to bestow my approbation or place my affections. But then I need not hate the villain, and thus punish myself for his iniquities. I have indeed been deceived. I am greately disappointed. Neither should I endeavor to injure the man who is already so wretched. Punish him I may for his own reformation and the benefit of society; for this is consistent with the purest benevolence. And all this can be effected most beneficially without the least hatred or revenge. Pity him I must, for he has forfeited all respect, even the respect of himself. Yet I may blame him for his wickedness, aim to bring him to a sense of his depravity, strive to aid him in the great work of reformation, and ever wish for him all real blessings. Thus shall I manifest my good will, my benevolent desire, which in scripture is frequently called love.

3. Now reason and religion both require that our love should always be proportioned to the good qualities of the objects beloved. Why are we commanded to love our heavenly Father supremely? Because he is a perfect being, exhibiting every possible perfection, possessing no unlovely qualities, and constantly manifesting his infinite affection towards his rational children. And why are we required to love our Saviour in sincerity? Because he is the

son of the Most High, and lived a sinless life on earth, and discovered the most disinterested benevolence for the salvation of mankind. And why are we exhorted to love our fellow creatures as ourselves? Because they are of the same nature, equally pure and innocent, equally dear by birth to our common Parent, and equally necessary to the general welfare. As we would not willingly wish ourselves evil or do ourselves injury, so we should never wish evil to others or do them an intentional injury. As we are uniformly desirous of securing happiness to ourselves, and continually striving to attain higher degrees of felicity, so we should always wish all others to be happy, and incessantly aim to promote their highest and best interests for time and eternity. And why do we love our partners, our children, our parents, our relatives and our friends, better than those with whom we have less intimacy and acquaintance? Because we either see or think we see more engaging qualities in those who are thus endeared by all the ties of nature and association; and also because we either receive or think we receive more affection and confidence and benefits in return. And why did our Saviour love Lazarus and his sisters better than the members of any other family; and why was John the best beloved of his apostles? Because he saw in these several individuals more worthy qualities than in others of his associates. So it should be with all his disciples. We should never respect nor esteem any thing sinful in either friend or foe. Those who hate us, and en-

deavor to do us evil, we can neither honor nor love in the sense described. But we can and we ought to cherish good will towards them; a desire for their reformation and improvement. And if we cherish this forgiving, benevolent disposition towards those who are vicious and inimical, we comply with our Saviour's command in its true import. We love our enemies in the manner enjoined.

But this feeling of forgiveness and benevolence must not be hypocritical; it must exist in the heart, and not merely in the words of the mouth. I fear this is not always the case. You frequently notice persons who declare their readiness to pardon those who have injured them, and their desire to aid in their reformation and improvement. But you may also hear them affirm with a significant shake of the head, that they shall never *forget* their enemies, although they are disposed to forgive. Now you are furnished by this indication with the strongest proof of the remaining ill will and enmity of their hearts. They are ready to rejoice in the misfortunes of those they pretend to have forgiven and profess to love. They are waiting for opportunities to throw out designing hints and base insinuations and exaggerated charges against their reputation. They are desirous of injuring their feelings or influence or character as opportunities offer. You thus see that their pretensions are hypocritical. Such greatly deceive themselves. Their ill will still burns in their breasts. It may be overlaid with the ashes of hypocrisy, but will burst into a flame whenever fanned by the winds

of opposition and interest. This does not answer the requisition of the Saviour. There must be heart-felt benevolence, and this principle must be manifested in thoughts and feelings and conversation and actions.

II. Why should we love our enemies?

1. If we would secure our own happiness, we must love our enemies. Look into society and select an individual who disobeys this command. A little attention will soon convince you that his very enmity destroys his daily enjoyment. For you perceive that a sense of his supposed injuries is ever uppermost in his thoughts. He is frequently meditating on the real or imagined failings of his opponents. He is searching out some method of revenge which does not come under the cognizance of the laws. And you occasionally hear him venting his ill will and hatred in unmeasured terms of reproach, since from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. You may also remark his uneasiness and vexation whenever the good name or proper conduct or worldly success of his adversaries is mentioned. And should he meet them face to face, he cannot look them steadily in the eye, or behold them with a calm, unblushing, unruffled countenance. All this is sufficient to convince you that his heart is the abode of envy, jealousy, hatred, resentment; and also that his tatlings, and slanders, and evil surmises, and secret machinations are the natural fruits of his ungoverned passions. And so long as this enmity is permitted to tyrannize over the better affec-

tions of his soul, so long must he be deprived of real satisfaction. Let him be in whatever occupation or situation you please, he can find no relief for his wretchedness but in thorough reformation. So long then, my friends, as any of you cherish ill will or revenge towards any of your fellow men, so long you foster the seeds of wretchedness in your own bosoms; so long you banish from them peace, tranquillity, happiness; so long you give residence to a vile company of tormenting feelings, sensations, desires and passions. And travel wherever you may, remain wherever you choose, you will still have a hell in your bosoms. For our Saviour has expressly assured us that until we have forgiven our enemies we cannot expect the divine forgiveness; until we banish our hatred and enmity from our hearts by thorough reformation, they will continue to torment and punish us. You thus learn the great importance of loving your enemies in order to secure your own happiness, for your own experience or observation must have convinced you that those who disregard this divine command are punished by their disobedience.

But this is not the whole of the evidence. We are created for happiness, but we cannot expect to secure this blessing unless we conform to the laws of our Creator. For he is perfectly happy only because he is perfectly holy. If he could feel anger or wrath or hatred, he would be miserable like his imperfect creatures; for these evil dispositions are *directly* opposed to love, which is the essence of his

nature. Although we are made for happiness, we cannot enjoy it unless we are conformed to his moral image. And the more we resemble Him and our Saviour, the nearer shall we approach to perfect happiness. Consequently our enjoyment must be diminished in exact proportion to our hatred and enmity. Our true interest therefore consists in cheerfully and heartily forgiving those who injure us, in blessing those who curse us, in doing good to those who despitefully use and persecute us. For in this way we return good for evil, and thus prove ourselves the children of our Father and the practical followers of our Saviour.

2. If we would make our enemies good and happy, we must love them in the manner described. Unless we really desire to promote their best welfare, we shall probably endeavor to make them miserable. We shall be watching for opportunities to make them hateful and hated by others, to exult over their misfortunes and imperfections, and to injure their popularity or enjoyment. When such a spirit of enmity pervades any of the members of a family, a neighborhood, a society, a town, it produces an abundant harvest of evil speaking and evil acting; and it also prevents improvement in knowledge, goodness and friendship. The only way in which the peace and happiness of such a community can be restored is by changing its spirit and disposition. From a selfish, unkind, malignant, inimical temper, it must manifest a forbearing, forgiving, accommodating, confiding, benevolent character. Thus will

each one notice and remember, not the slights and foibles and failings of others, but their amiable and virtuous and christian qualities. Thus will each one endeavor, not to ensnare and injure and ruin others, but to build them up in everything manly and virtuous and dignified. Social intercourse will thus be productive of improvement and satisfaction. We shall all be better, and do better, and feel better; and we shall also be instrumental in bettering the condition and character of those we call our enemies.

3. We must love our enemies, if we would obey the commands of our Saviour and our Father. We believe we were created for happiness, because a Creator of perfect love would have had no other object in our creation. We must also conclude that he could have no other end in view in giving us laws for the regulation of our heart and life. For the amount of the whole code is nothing more nor less than this: Do thyself no harm; do thyself all possible good. Since such are the designs of our existence and the revelation of our Father's will, shall we not obey this most useful precept of our commissioned Saviour? A precept given solely for the promotion of our temporal and spiritual enjoyment. And since our Saviour has done and suffered so much to communicate and exemplify the beauty of those divine commands, shall we not manifest our gratitude to him by our obedience? Shall we not strive to be his humble *imitators*? Shall we not aim to prove ourselves his *true* followers by our imitation of his example?

Yes; if we wish to secure our own enjoyment, if we wish to perform the God-like duty of promoting the happiness of others, if we wish to obey the commands of our Father, we shall love our enemies.

III. What means must we adopt in order to love our enemies?

1. We must cultivate a desire to love them. This is the first step for the attainment of the prescribed disposition. This is too frequently forgotten or neglected. You occasionally hear individuals making the following remarks:—'We cannot love our enemies; it is an utter impossibility; it is contrary to our nature; it is a command too difficult to be obeyed; it is a saying too hard to be heard.' Now to all such assertions I would make two replies. And first, we may rest assured that both our Saviour and our Father know our ability; know what duties we can perform and what dispositions we can acquire and exhibit; understand most perfectly our capacities and our strength. And we accuse them either of ignorance or cruelty, if we believe they have commanded impossibilities. Yes; we virtually charge them with not knowing what man could perform, or of directing him to accomplish labors beyond the powers of human ability. But either supposition is too absurd for our belief. The second and true answer then is this:—You have not really desired to obey the precept. You have not sincerely endeavored to love your enemies. You have not made persevering exertions to acquire this christian disposition. You have not fervently prayed to imitate the exam-

ple of your forgiving Saviour. Whoever among you are disposed to make the above excuses for your neglect and disobedience, must remember that you have a great work to perform. You must cultivate a desire to obey the divine injunction. This you can effect by meditating on the folly, the guilt, the wretchedness of your enmity; on the importance, the necessity, the obligation, the pleasure of obedience; on the life, the labors, the sacrifices, the sufferings of Jesus, and on the paternal character and impartial love of your heavenly Father. And when you have originated, and strengthened, and confirmed this desire to love your enemies, the principal obstacles to your obedience will be removed.

2. We should endeavor to become better acquainted with those we call our enemies, if we would love them as commanded. Many of the dislikes and enmities of common life arise from ignorance of each others character. We are too apt to form our estimate of one another, from some uncommon action, some unguarded expression, some unintentional slight, some well-meaning interference with our interest, or some unimportant circumstances. A person may possess many amiable and praiseworthy qualities, but if we happen to discover one mean or disingenuous trait in his disposition or character, we think more of the one disagreeable part than of all the lovely and virtuous ones; and while we forget very easily what is estimable, we are always ready to mention what is

offensive. We thus form our opinion of others, and lead our acquaintances into the same errors, in this unfair and ungenerous manner. So with regard to a difference of sentiment. If we happen to disagree with our neighbors on one or a few controverted topics, we are commonly disposed to make more of our slight disagreement than of our great harmony on many other more important subjects. Now we ought ever to remember that we all have more or less failings, imperfections and iniquities in our own characters, which are known to others; and which are also circulated to our disadvantage. We should also recollect that we differ as much from others as they do from us, and on this account are equally exposed to their dislike and censure. We should therefore endeavor to form more intimate acquaintance with those who sustain a reputable standing in society. We should make the same allowance for the weaknesses and faults of others, that we wish them to make for ours. We should regard an honest difference in sentiment as an unavoidable occurrence, and by no means to be feared or dreaded. And if we are all aiming to become pure and practical christians, the more intimate our friendship, the more lovely qualities we shall discover. Our hatred will diminish, and our affection will increase.

3. If we would love our enemies we must often contemplate the example of our Saviour. From his temptation in the wilderness to his agonizing death on the cross, he was beset by human enemies; enemies the most unreasonable, the most

persevering, the most malicious, the most inhuman. But he never manifested towards them any feelings of ill will, or hatred, or anger, or resentment, or revenge. He never returned evil for evil, railing for railing, or cruelty for persecution. No; he ever regarded their spiritual welfare as one grand object of his mission. He freely imparted to them the most salutary and soul-saving instructions. And for their temporal and eternal happiness, he labored, he wept, he taught, he prayed, he suffered. And while experiencing the pangs of a cruel and ignominious death, he even besought his Father also to forgive his brutal murderers. Learn from this heavenly example how to forgive and love *your* enemies. Learn to banish from your bosoms—all ill will and hatred and revenge. Learn to do good to all as you have opportunity. You may be assured that this is the only safe path to true happiness. And when you shall be summoned to part with all temporal things, you may depend that you can derive nothing but misery from a retrospect of your enmities, and nothing but satisfaction from your forgiving and benevolent dispositions. And when you enter the other world, you cannot enjoy the society of saints and angels, of Jesus and his Father, unless your souls are purified from all hatred and revenge. Will you not then strive to obey the command of your acknowledged Master? You are urged by many powerful motives, by a regard to your own peace and happiness and salvation, by your desire for the promotion of human welfare and felicity, and *by your love* for Jesus and God.

SERMON XVIII.

CHRIST OUR TEACHER.

JOHN III. 2. WE KNOW THAT THOU ART A TEACHER COME FROM GOD; FOR NO MAN CAN DO THESE MIRACLES THAT THOU DOEST, EXCEPT GOD BE WITH HIM.

THESE words were spoken to Jesus. They contain a true description of his character and office. His miracles surely proved his divine mission. He executed his important trust with fidelity. He cordially invited all to come and learn of him. Although he has ascended to his God and our God, yet his gracious invitations are extended to all succeeding generations. In his precious gospel, which contains a faithful record of his labors and teachings and sufferings, he now entreats each one of us to hear and obey his instructions. Shall we not listen to the soothing voice of this heavenly teacher, this disinterested friend, this all-sufficient Saviour?

I. What are some of the most important lessons which we may learn from our heavenly teacher?

1. From the instructions of Jesus you may learn the true character of God. You all believe in the

existence of one all-perfect creator and ruler of the universe. But how will you know his real nature? How will you ascertain that he is a being of infinite perfections? How will you discover that he interests himself in the welfare and happiness of his rational offspring? Will you go to the uncivilized heathen? He will tell you that the great spirit is capricious, changeable, cruel and revengeful. Will you listen to the renowned sages of antiquity? They will inform you that their gods many and lords many are imperfect, licentious, quarrelsome and indifferent to human affairs. Will you visit the wise men of the eastern world? They will assert that Deity exists in thirty million of persons, and is pleased with human sacrifices. Will you depend on the conclusions of unenlightened reason? Read the views of every unchristian people, and you will find them low, puerile, degraded. Will you search the controversial writings of professed believers? From them you will obtain but little satisfaction. For while some represent the Supreme Being as a partial and unfeeling tyrant, others ascribe to him human weakness and imbecility. No. From none of these sources can you learn the true character of God.

Turn then, my friends, to the heaven-taught Jesus. He assures you that your Maker is possessed of infinite and unlimited perfections. He assures you that your Preserver is a being of perfect love. He assures you that your moral Governor is truly an ever-present Father. Yes. You can now believe that the author of your existence feels for you

an infinite affection; that he has created you for happiness here and hereafter; that he orders all the events of your lives in wisdom and goodness, and that he designs the best welfare of his children in all his dispensations. You thus perceive that all the apparent evils of time are permitted in benevolence, and overruled for the promotion of the greatest possible good. Here then you obtain instruction of the utmost importance; instruction consonant to the dictates of enlightened reason and unperverted conscience; instruction accordant with the best feelings and highest aspirations of your nature; instruction absolutely essential to your greatest improvement and happiness; instruction proved true by the operations of natural laws, the events of providence, and the inspired teachings of the son of the Most High. Here you secure an immoveable foundation for present peace and consolation and felicity; and for future everlasting bliss and ultimate perfection. Here you find the strongest possible inducement to love, gratitude, submission, obedience and worship. If then you would obtain the truth on this momentous subject, go not to savage or sage; go not to hindoo or Mahometan; go not to jewish or christian partizans; but resort directly and humbly to the commissioned Jesus. And while you learn from his lips that your Creator is your ever-present, all-perfect, unchangeable friend and Father, learn also from his example to render unto him the confidence, affection and obedience of children.

2. From the instructions of Jesus you may learn

the true character of man. When we enter this world, we can have no moral character; we can be neither sinful nor holy, because we cannot distinguish between good and evil. Our souls are mere blanks, wholly incapable of the formation of moral habits. As we increase in years, our characters begin to form, and they take their complexion from various circumstances; from our situation in life; from the instructions we receive and the examples we imitate; from the sentiments we adopt and the habits we form. As we advance to maturity of understanding we learn the distinction between right and wrong, virtue and vice. We readily notice that some persons are more pure and holy than others, and we conclude that some individuals are really better than others. Sensible of our own failings we admit our unrighteousness. But comparing ourselves with some around us, and being necessarily partial in our examinations and judgments, we conclude that our characters, if not so perfect as a few, are indeed worthier than many. And hence we are prone to rest easy in our self-delusion and sinfulness. We do not ascertain the true state of our hearts and lives. How then shall we find a remedy for this evil?

Go to the heavenly Jesus. He assures you that infants need no conversion; that they are already in the kingdom of heaven, and are to be ranked among the pure in heart. He would have them kept from the evil that is in the world, and trained up to high degrees of moral goodness. He would have you all

form a perfect character; such an one as he exhibited when on earth. He would have you acquire the moral virtues in the same manner that he did, by a conscientious discharge of all incumbent duties; by loving God with your whole heart; by loving your fellow-men as yourselves; by restraining all your animal appetites and propensities, all your intellectual passions and desires, within the prescribed bounds of reason and religion. By comparing your motives and thoughts, dispositions and tempers, conversation and conduct with his teaching and example, you may learn your deficiencies and transgressions. These must be known before you can proceed to reformation and improvement. You must then strive to approach this model of christian perfection. And though you cannot hope to obtain all in this world; though you can never become so holy but there will be room for improvement, still you can never innocently relax your efforts. You are solemnly bound to press forward towards the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. If then you would learn your true character, go not to human moralists merely; go not to heathen philosophy; compare not yourselves with your erring and sinning companions; but go directly to the sinless Saviour; contemplate his spotless example; imbibe his heavenly temper; prove yourselves his obedient disciples, and you will secure the unspeakable rewards of holiness.

3. From the instructions of Jesus you may learn the true way of salvation. When you have done

wrong, you experience suffering of some kind. You are punished to some extent by your wickedness. From this fact, familiar to you all, you naturally infer that the same moral government will be exercised over you in another world. This inference is confirmed by your views of the impartiality of your Father, and the instructions of his commissioned Saviour. By reflecting on your own depravity, and the certain and righteous retributions for iniquity, you are necessarily led to inquire what you must do to be saved; to be delivered from the natural consequences of your disobedience; to be rendered constantly joyful and happy, and to be prepared for a triumphant death and a glorious entrance upon the rewards of the righteous? To these questions Jesus has returned satisfactory answers. He teaches you that salvation is deliverance from sin, ignorance and error, and the possession of knowledge, truth and holiness. And he saves us by giving us a knowledge of the truth, and motives to the practice of our duty. He saves us by the principles and discoveries of his religion, and by the assurance of a future existence and a righteous retribution. He allures us into the paths of virtue and safety by his own bright example, the reasonableness of his teachings, and the sacred sanctions and consolations of the gospel.

You thus perceive that the great work of salvation consists in becoming truly virtuous and pious; in believing the instructions of Jesus, and obeying his commands. To these we must give our unremitting

attention. Being dependent and sinful creatures we must render to our Creator gratitude, resignation, obedience, confidence and affection. Being brethren, we must render to others the same rights and privileges, attentions and kindnesses, which we claim from them. Being imperfect in our nature, we must control and govern our appetites, tempers, passions and imaginations. If then we believe the truth, and practise what is right, we are saved for time; we are saved for eternity. And we are assured by our teacher and our experience that our happiness must be proportioned to our moral goodness. To effect all this the instructions of our Saviour are perfectly adapted. They are fitted for all ages and conditions, all relations and characters. Go not then to the publican or the sinner; go not to the pharisee or sadducee; go not to this or that leader of a religious party; but go directly to the inspired Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life; and from his unerring declarations learn the true way of salvation.

4. From the instructions of Jesus you may learn the true consolation for all your afflictions. Our happiness is disturbed by two causes; by our own misconduct, and by those adverse events above human control. The sufferings of our own causing are the natural consequences of our wicked actions, our ungoverned passions, our sinful habits. Those arising from afflictive occurrences consist in disappointments, bereavements, mental or bodily anguish, and distressing grief. And where will you find a remedy for these trials? In Christ Jesus. He teaches

you that reformation is the cure, and the only cure, for the misery of sinfulness. If you avoid wickedness you will escape its punishments. Whenever, therefore, any thing wrong is discovered in your opinions, dispositions, conversation or conduct, let it be exchanged for what is right and beneficial, and the consequence will be enjoyment and satisfaction. Reformation then as you learn from experience as well as from your divinely qualified teacher, is the only remedy for those evils which you bring upon yourselves by your transgressions, and over which you can exert a saving influence.

As to those trials which are permitted by our heavenly Father, the only adequate consolation is to be found in our obedience to the lessons of our teacher. He assures us that our loving Parent is ever present with us all; that he orders the events of our lives in goodness, and that he designs our spiritual welfare in all his dispensations. These principles, when reduced to constant belief and practice, will give us peace and comfort in the darkest hour of sorrow. When our fondest hopes are blasted; when the hand of poverty has pressed us to the earth; when disease has prostrated us on a bed of sickness; when the loss of endeared friends has filled our hearts with grief, we must look to our Father in confidence. We must realize that he is the author of our troubles, and that he is ever ready to relieve our distresses when they have produced their destined effects upon our characters. If then you would have consolation under all your afflictions, go

not to the cup of dissipation; go not to the visions of despair and self-destruction; go not to the society of the giddy and thoughtless; go not to the cold and dismal teachings of skepticism; but go directly to him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who was tried as we are and can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and from him learn to have your daily and hourly conduct declare your practical and cheerful resignation to the divine will.

5. From the instructions of Jesus you may learn the true doctrine of another existence. When you behold a friend in the embraces of death, you wish to be informed if he will ever awake. You desire to know if there be a second life beyond the grave. This inquiry is natural to the human heart. It has been asked and repeated by all nations, and by all nations answered in the affirmative, but left unproved. All have hoped for immortality, although their hope has rested on a feeble foundation. How then shall we become rationally convinced that we are to survive the dissolution of our bodies; and from whom can we learn the character the of next stage of being? From the anointed Jesus. He alone has brought life and immortality to light. He explicitly and authoritatively informs us of our future destination. To demonstrate the truth of this most important doctrine, he submitted to the ignominious death of the cross, that he might not only confirm his instructions, but also be raised to an immortal life. And all shall come forth, those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those

who have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation. All this is rational, consistent, desirable. All this is well calculated to exert a wonderful influence on our character and happiness. And all this cannot be learned from any other teacher. If then you would know the true destination of man, go not to the ancient Egyptian, for he will promise you another life only in the body of some other animal. Go not to the mussulman, for he presents you with nothing but a sensual paradise. Go not to ancient philosophy, for she never discovered any better world than the present. Go to none of these religions, for they are earthly, sensual, degraded. No. Go directly to Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, who is the first fruits of them who slept, and who has gone to prepare mansions in his Father's house for all his obedient children.

II. But why should we learn of this heaven sent teacher.

1. We should learn of Jesus, because of the excellency of his qualifications. He was perfectly qualified to impart all needed religious instruction. This we know from his testimonials. For you recollect that when he finished his sermon on the mount, the people were astonished at his doctrine, and declared that he spoke as one having authority. On another occasion the Jews inquired, whence hath this man this wisdom, having never learned? His own answer is sufficiently satisfactory. The words which I speak are not mine, but his who sent *me*. Even his enemies testified that man never *spake like* that man. The Jewish rulers affirmed

that no man could perform the miracles which he wrought, except God were with him. And now add to all this the voice from heaven. This is my beloved son; hear ye him. Surely our all-wise Father would not have commanded us to hear one who was not qualified to instruct us in everything essential to our salvation.

Now you cannot suspect the value of his credentials, when you notice the commentary of his own example. He practised what he taught. In his own person he exhibited such a character as he wished to form in others. He was not like the pharisaic instructers, who laid heavy burdens upon other men's shoulders, but performed none of the labor themselves. His belief exerted a constant influence on his heart and life. Every command he gave to others he obeyed himself. He indeed knew what lessons were needed; for he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took upon him the seed of Abraham. He was made like unto his brethren, yet without sin; like them he was tempted, exposed to poverty and persecution and affliction. From his own experience he understood the wants of human nature. Of course, he was qualified by divine love for their instruction and salvation. But to crown the whole, he laid down his life as a witness to the truth, and for the redemption of the world. This was indeed necessary to perfect his example, to seal the sincerity of his pretensions, and to give efficacy to the gospel. And what other qualifications did he need? None at all; for he

possessed such powers as no earthly teacher ever enjoyed. And shall not this induce you to learn of him? Will you not renounce all allegiance to mere earthly masters, and cleave unto him alone as the author and finisher of your faith?

2. We should learn of Jesus, because of the excellency of his instructions. They contain truth without error. They are rational and consistent. They are practical and consolatory. They are adapted to the wants and necessities of human beings. They are designed to promote inward purity, outward virtue, and unfailing enjoyment. They secure the assent of every unperverted understanding, and the warm affection of every unpolluted heart. When made the rule of belief and practice, they answer their wise and holy purpose. They are not only true, but infinitely important. They have little reference to the trifles of a transitory world. They relate to those topics most deeply interesting to immortal spirits. To such what can be more interesting than a knowledge of their Creator, their own character, their present duties, their means of consolation under affliction and their future destination? Nothing. And from our heaven inspired teacher we obtain this knowledge, and every other which is necessary to our peace and happiness in time and eternity.

Not only so. These instructions are not only true and important, but really divine. Hear the declaration of Jesus himself. As the Father gave *me* commandment, so I speak. If so, as we have *sufficient* evidence to believe, then they are from

heaven. Compare them with any human teachings which have ever appeared, in any age or nation or language; and what is the result? Men have thought and written on the same and similar subjects, from the first dawn of civilization to the present hour. But can you point to one of the hundreds and thousands of systems, which contains either a rational and consistent and pure faith, or a code of laws adapted to the wants of imperfect, sinful, suffering, dying immortals? If then the words of Jesus are so excellent, so far surpass all human compositions, will you not make them the man of your counsel and the rule of your conduct?

3. We should learn of Jesus because of the excellency of those who have obeyed his instructions. All who receive him for their master in religion, and resemble him in their temper and conduct are his obedient disciples. And are not all such more excellent in their characters than believers in false religions; the savages, the hindoos, the mahometans? Are they not also better than those who live in christian lands, and yet do not make the religion of Jesus their guide in belief and practice? Between these classes it is indeed difficult or rather impossible to make an impartial comparison. For all who have been educated in gospel privileges have received more or less christian instruction; and they are actuated more or less by christian motives and principles, and they have formed more or fewer christian habits. Yet there is a decided difference between those who conscientiously endeavor to learn of Christ Jesus, and those who pay

no intentional regard to his teachings. And this distinction is sufficiently manifest in most cases to be noticed. In short, who are the best husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors? Are they not those who live in nearest accordance with the precepts and example of Jesus? Most assuredly. No one will dispute this truth. If then you desire to be good in all the relations of life, will you not endeavor to receive Jesus as your infallible teacher?

Thus, my friends, have I set before you Christ Jesus as your inspired religious teacher. And do you not need his instructions for life, for death, for eternity? Certainly. You need them now, to enlighten your minds with a knowledge of truth and duty; to guard you from temptation and sin; to support you under the trials of your pilgrimage; to console you in hours of affliction and sorrow, and to give you unfailing peace and happiness. You will need them in the hour of death, to yield you pleasing reflections on the past; to arm you with fortitude for the moment of dissolution; to brighten your prospects of immortal blessedness, and to give you joy and rapture when you bid adieu to all earthly objects. You will need their effects in eternity, to qualify you for the employments and enjoyments of the heavenly world. You are therefore urged by all you hold most dear and sacred in life, in death, in eternity, to receive Jesus as your anointed Saviour and teacher. For you must know that no man could do those miracles which *he did* when on earth, except God be with him.

SERMON XIX.

THE GOSPEL A SAFE GUIDE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.

PSALM CXIX. 105. THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH.

If you have ever ventured out in the darkness of night, you have doubtless experienced some difficulty in finding a safe and pleasant path. But if at any time you took a lighted lamp, you will recollect that it shed a bright ray directly before you; and that so long as you travelled in its brightness, you easily avoided difficulties and dangers. When however any temptation seduced you from the enlightened way, you soon found yourself in trouble again, stumbling over the various obstacles which impeded your progress. Not only so. If at any time several of you were in company, you will remember that the light of your lamp was sufficient to enable you all to proceed together in safety and comfort. But whenever you halted to dispute about the nature of the surrounding objects, upon which your taper cast but a dim and indistinct light,

your enjoyment ceased, and your feelings became excited, and angry, and painful. As a lamp in a dark night renders your walk safe and pleasant, so the gospel of Jesus enlightens and blesses the journey of human life.

Let me apply this illustration. We are in a world of darkness and doubt, of temptation and wickedness, of suffering and affliction, of misery and death. The gospel of Jesus is given to enlighten our minds, to solve our difficulties, to make us acquainted with our duties, to purify our hearts, to sustain us under our trials, to console us in our afflictions, to make us cheerful and happy by making us virtuous and holy. And if we open our understandings to this divine light, and avoid the tempers and practices which it forbids, and regulate our motives and affections according to its directions, and perform all its commanded duties, and obey and imitate the great captain of our salvation, we pass along the current of time securely and joyfully. The more perfectly we conform to his requisitions, the more happiness we shall secure. This must be admitted by every candid observer. But on the other hand, if we prefer darkness rather than light, and reject the counsels of religion, and slight the invitations of mercy, and disregard the voice of wisdom, and live a thoughtless or dissipated life, we become involved in guilt and wretchedness. The farther we depart from the precepts of Jesus, the more misery we bring upon ourselves. This every one must acknowledge.

Not only so. If at any time several of us unite together as christian travellers, so long as we walk in the unerring light of the divine lamp, and abide by the clear decisions of the gospel, we shall walk in peace and harmony and happiness. But whenever we begin to dispute and quarrel about those points which are either obscurely revealed or imperfectly understood, our christian union, felicity and improvement will terminate. Our souls will become disturbed and tormented with uncharitable feelings and unhallowed passions. All this must be regarded as undisputed truth, confirmed by experience and observation. This being the fact, I wish to induce you all to receive the gospel as a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. And I would urge you to this duty from one plain consideration. It is this. The christian religion is the only safe and sufficient guide of religious faith and practice. It is the only rule of belief and conduct which can ensure your present enjoyment and everlasting felicity.

1. But perhaps you will first inquire, if reason is not a safe and sufficient guide of faith and practice? To this question I have no hesitation in returning a decided negative. I am bold to assert that unaided reason is not a safe and sufficient guide. I believe I can prove the truth of this assertion to the full satisfaction of every candid hearer. I shall merely refer you for evidence to several classes of well known and indisputable facts. Look to all those nations of both ancient and modern times which *never received the* gospel. Have they not uniform-

ly been worshippers of idols; deities of their own making or creation? Notice Greece and Rome, the two most enlightened, refined, educated, unchristian people who have ever inhabited this globe. And can you read the history of their gods, the gods which were reverenced by some of their philosophers as well as by their most ignorant dependants, without a smile at their absurdity. If you survey the less civilized communities you find their belief on this subject still more childish and degrading. And can you mention one unchristian nation, except the Hebrews, of either ancient or modern times, whose belief respecting superior powers, gods and goddesses, is rational? Not one. You must pronounce their views uniformly absurd, irrational, ridiculous, degrading. Here then you see the fruits of unaided reason; the inventions of unenlightened reason; all that boasted reason could accomplish on this most important question. In view of these incontrovertible statements, must you not conclude that reason is not a safe and sufficient guide of religious faith. And on examination you will find her conclusions on most other topics of belief equally unsatisfactory and unreasonable.

Not only so. Has the conduct of unchristian nations been any better than their religious faith? Not at all. They have uniformly been addicted to the most barbarous cruelties and the most abominable immoralities. Read the page of history for yourselves. Have they not universally treated the female sex as inferior beings, as slaves to their

lusts and passions, as degraded menials? Have they known anything of the delights of home, of domestic endearments and enjoyments, of the sweet and holy affections of family? Have they not very generally yielded themselves servants to their appetites and propensities, and debased themselves to a level with the brutes? Have they not offered human sacrifices, and in some instances destroyed their own relatives and children? And was not all this done at the suggestion of unaided reason? Survey the heathen nations of the present period. Does their reason lead them to the practice of good morals?—to such duties as are essential to the present welfare of individuals, families and communities? By no means, if we may believe unprejudiced human testimony. Now here is another class of facts which no one can doubt or deny. They furnish an unanswerable argument in favor of my position. The more it is examined the stronger will be its influence. It is therefore fully evident to my mind that unaided reason is not a safe and sufficient guide of faith and practice.

Now I would not be understood to decry or disparage reason. By no means. For it is the first best gift of our Father. There is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty has given him understanding. The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord. But reason and understanding alone are not sufficient to insure our highest earthly perfection and happiness. This is made fully evident by the example of all heathen nations. We need more

light. This is given in the gospel, as you may learn from experience and observation. For you well know that those individuals and communities whose belief conforms most nearly to the very words of the Saviour, and whose characters correspond most closely to his example, are the most reasonable in their faith, the most virtuous in their practice, the most benevolent towards others, and the most happy in their lives. So that no person of the least candor and information can doubt the necessity of a revelation, or the beneficial tendency of pure Christianity. And all this brings no degradation on reason. No. Revelation is not designed to supersede reason; it is simply the perfection of reason; it reveals nothing contrary to reason; it brings to light truths which unaided reason had never discovered, but truths which reason heartily embraces as soon as comprehended. And without the full and free exercise of reason, revelation would be of no service whatever. For it is the province of reason to examine and decide on the evidence which supports revelation; and also to investigate the meaning and embrace the discoveries of revelation; for one cannot be received without satisfactory testimony, and the other cannot be believed unless rational and consistent. Such is the gospel, supported by the most convincing evidence, and inculcating nothing contrary to sound reason. While then we are unspeakably grateful for our distinguishing attribute of reason, let us also manifest equal gratitude for that revelation which has raised us so far

above every unchristian nation of ancient or modern times. Let us increase and invigorate our gratitude by making ourselves acquainted with the condition, religion and happiness of all heathen nations; and let us manifest more fully our gratitude by exercising our reason in the study of the higher light of revelation, and conforming more carefully to all its requisitions.

2. But perhaps you will next inquire if conscience is not a safe and sufficient guide of faith and practice? This question I shall also answer in the negative. I fearlessly affirm that unenlightened conscience is not a safe and sufficient guide. And I think I can prove the truth of this position to the perfect satisfaction of intelligent and candid hearers. I shall again refer you to several classes of well known and indisputable facts. Look once more to unchristian nations. Why did our heathen ancestors in the mother land sacrifice their children to imaginary and cruel deities? To satisfy their conscience. Why does the hindoo widow burn herself on the funeral pile of her departed husband? To quiet her conscience. And in any of these communities, has conscience made them good husbands and wives, good parents and children, good friends and neighbors? Has it secured them much personal, domestic, or religious enjoyment? I need not ask these questions of the well informed. You know that idolatry, superstition, licentiousness the most degrading, cruelties the most shocking, are the fruits of their conscience. This simple reference to the reli-

gion and morality of heathen nations must satisfy all that unenlightened conscience is not a safe guide of faith and practice.

But perhaps you will now ask, if inhabitants of christian lands may safely obey conscience in preference to the gospel? No. This experiment has been fairly tried. The catholics formerly persecuted and murdered the protestants; and all in obedience to conscience. The protestants in turn not only murdered the catholics but those of their own denomination who would not swear to a human creed; and all for conscience sake. Our pious forefathers banished the baptists, and murdered the quakers, and hung the supposed witches; and all to satisfy conscience, falsely so called. At the present day you may see professing christians in various sects who are guilty of practices which are unscriptural; and conscience is pleaded in excuse. Now is such christian fruit? Is it obeying the golden rule? I think not. And if all were to have such consciences, the world would again soon be filled with blood and violence. If then you consider these well known facts; the irrational belief and abominable practices of heathens; the inconsistent faith and unrighteous conduct of professing christians, when they prefer what they call conscience to the gospel, you must admit that conscience unenlightened is no safe and sufficient guide.

Now I would not say one word to injure the influence of a good conscience. For I regard it as of *great* value and importance. The evil is here. In

unchristian nations the people have had no means of educating conscience; no sufficient and satisfactory means. And in christian lands, many have mistaken their prejudices, their will, their passions, their ignorance, their bigotry, for the dictates of conscience. They have set what they called conscience above revelation, and then proceeded to commit unchristian practices. But the proper course is to cultivate conscience; to enlighten it at the ever burning lamp of revelation; to follow its dictates so far as they conform to the plain instructions of Jesus, and no farther. Thus conscience would prove a most valuable and faithful monitor, and would generally direct us to walk in the way of truth and duty. While therefore we are grateful for the gift of conscience, which in an unenlightened state is not a safe and sufficient guide, let us be still more grateful for the means of educating and enlightening it in all things essential to peace and holiness.

Now the only way of determining the question, whether reason and conscience are safe and sufficient guides of faith and practice, is to consider the example of those nations which have never received the christian revelation. They have surely done for such people all they could do in an unenlightened state for any people. For some of them in both ancient and modern times have taken high ground in mental cultivation; and all of them have had sufficient time to make a fair experiment. And no man of intelligence will contend that heathen nations are to be compared with christian lands, in point of

rational belief, and correct morals, and real enjoyment. When you appeal to the reason and conscience of those who reject the gospel among ourselves, you must remember that they have received a christian education, and are greatly indebted to the influences of the gospel for what is rational in their creeds or correct in their characters. For it would be absurd to suppose their reason and conscience, if unaided by the light of revelation, would have led to anything better than the reason and conscience of the Greeks and Romans, Chinese and Hindoos. Our conclusion then is firmly established, that unaided reason and unenlightened conscience are not safe and sufficient guides of faith and practice; because they have not led to a pure and rational faith or a virtuous and holy character.

3. You will now ask me, why the gospel is a safe and sufficient guide of faith and practice? Because this is the decision of reason, experience, observation and conscience. The instructions of Jesus are perfectly adapted to the nature of man, to his inherent wants, his absolute necessities, his unavoidable circumstances, his intellectual and moral powers, his tempted and suffering condition, his perfection and happiness. Let me illustrate this remark by a few examples. The gospel assures you that there is one all perfect, ever present spiritual being, who is in deed and in truth your affectionate and unchangeable Father. Now is not this truth confirmed by the soundest conclusions of your reason, the *clearest* intimations of your conscience, and the best

feelings of your heart. Can there be anything unsafe in cherishing this belief, and in rendering love, gratitude, obedience, submission and confidence to this fountain of all good? On the contrary have not those who have rejected this truth been more or less immoral and unhappy? While those who have adhered to this faith have been supported in trial, aided in duty, preserved in happiness? Existing facts fully justify this conclusion. The gospel also requires you to do unto your fellow men as you would have them do unto you. And is this requisition unreasonable? Is it not a fact that those who depart farthest from this golden rule of duty, are most dishonest in their dealings, unkind in their feelings, avaricious in their dispositions, and miserable in their lives? Is it not a fact that those who live in nearest conformity to this injunction, are uniformly most virtuous and respected and happy? This every one can see for himself; and consequently no one can call it unsafe to obey this precept of Jesus. The gospel likewise assures us that we shall all live again, and be rewarded or punished according to our deeds. And is there anything unsafe or irrational in this belief? Have not those who rejected this article of the christian creed been made more or less miserable by their unbelief. And in the hour of dissolution have they not frequently manifested the insufficiency and wretchedness of infidelity? Abundant facts establish this position. Now I might make a similar remarks respecting every precept and prohibition of Jesus.

He requires us to believe no doctrines but such as are rational and productive of consolation and happiness. He commands no duties but such as are easy of performance and necessary to the full perfection of a rational and moral character. He forbids no practices or dispositions but such as are necessarily attended or followed by punishment. Now will a person endanger his safety or his enjoyment by believing and practising all that is revealed and required? Or will he find his faith and his christian character deficient for the purposes of support and consolation in any hour of need. No. This no one can justly pretend. On the contrary will not a man's goodness and happiness depend on his faith and practice, and be increased just in proportion to his conformity to the requisitions of christianity? Here then is a satisfactory reason why you should make the word of God a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

Perhaps you will now ask, how you are to make the gospel your guide of faith and practice? Study the instructions of Jesus and his apostles. Whatever doctrines you find plainly revealed, receive as divine truth; and let them exert a salutary influence on your hearts and characters. Whatever virtues you find plainly enjoyed, endeavor to acquire; and thus aim to form a christian character. Whatever feelings or tempers or practices you find plainly condemned, strive to forsake and avoid; and in all this act from principle. That is, seek to know the will of God, what is right, and practice accordingly,

without fear of consequences. Adhere to the path of rectitude with unwavering perseverance. Yield not to the temptations of indolence, or popularity, or interest, or pleasure. Pursue this course and you will find no difficulty. Your satisfaction will increase. Your character will improve. You will be useful and happy. You will pass through this life joyfully, and be prepared for a blessed immortality.

But if the gospel is so plain and safe a guide, why is there so much controversy respecting its true meaning? There is little or no disputing about what is absolutely essential either to good morals, or present and future salvation. The contentions of all ages have usually related to some obscure and unimportant subject. It is precisely like this; should you be walking by the dim light of a lamp in a dark night, and all at once come to a stand, and dispute warmly whether a certain tree beside you produced apples or pears. By waiting for more light you might readily decide the question. So christians may dispute about things either imagined, or obscurely revealed, but they can never come to an amicable settlement without more knowledge. And if they were wise enough and good enough to wait until we enter the other world, all our doubts and darkness on these particular subjects would be removed. But take everything really necessary to a good and happy life, a peaceful and triumphant death, and a blissful immortality, and how plainly is it revealed? What can be more

explicit than the following declarations? This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God; and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. If you follow these plain and intelligible instructions, all will be well with you in time; all will be well with you in eternity.

Why then should we dispute about what is not essential to salvation. Because we are blamed and denounced for rejecting what we deem error, and believing what we consider truth. For instance, I have evidence to convince me that God exists in one mind, one person, one will. For receiving this truth on the explicit testimony of Jesus and all prophets and apostles, I am called a heretic, infidel, demon; denied the christian name, rights, hopes; and sentenced to endless torments for my honest convictions. Now I must engage in controversy to maintain my inalienable rights, to defend myself against blind ignorance or wilful bigotry, to show that this doctrine is as plainly taught in scripture as the very existence of God, and to convince those who condemn me of their pernicious practical errors. If my opponents would allow me the same privileges which they claim for themselves; if they would leave me to the unmolested enjoyment of my honest opinions; if they would do as they wish to be done *by, there* would be little need of controversy. But

when our characters and hopes are assailed merely on account of our sincere sentiments; when we are excluded from the communion table and the baptismal fount solely on account of our belief; and when too we are accountable to no human authority for our faith, then indeed it becomes a duty to defend our precious rights and christian privileges. Let all the blame therefore of theological warfare fall where it belongs, upon those who are unwilling to do unto others as they would have others do unto them. And when ministers and people shall conform more sacredly to the precepts and example of Jesus, then and not till then, shall we have peace and union in the christian world.

SERMON XX.

YOUTH PERSUADED TO BECOME PRACTICAL CHRISTIANS.

JOSHUA XXIV. 15. CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE.

I WOULD invite your attention, my young friends, to some remarks on practical religion. I wish to persuade you to commence in earnest the important work of religious reformation and improvement. I do not indeed mean to insinuate that your characters are immoral or that your sentiments are heathenish. Your dispositions may be amiable, your habits virtuous, and your belief christian; and still you may confess to yourselves and others that you are not real christians. I must therefore take you on your own confession, and urge you to delay no longer the great business of salvation; to choose this day whom you will serve.

I. What is implied in making choice of practical religion

1. Decision is the first requisition. You are therefore solemnly requested to decide, not whether you will prefer christianity to paganism or

mahometanism or judaism, for I shall take it for granted that you believe in the divine origin of the gospel. If however you either doubt or disbelieve a truth so fundamental, the question cannot now be settled, because much examination of evidence may be necessary to your conviction and satisfaction. You are affectionately entreated to decide, not which denomination of believers has embraced the most truth and the fewest errors, for I consider your regular attendance in this church a sufficient acknowledgement of your unitarian opinions. But if you either doubt or disbelieve the divinity of liberal Christianity, the inquiry cannot be determined this day; for much time and reflection and investigation may be requisite for conversion and instruction. No. You are solemnly and affectionately urged to decide a more important question. Will you conscientiously endeavor to become practical christians. Will you receive Christ Jesus as your only master in matters of religion? Will you make his instructions the guide of your faith and practice? Will you avoid all that he has forbidden, in thought, temper, words and actions? Will you pursue all that he has commanded, in your relations to your fellow men, your Saviour and your heavenly Father? This then is the inquiry you are now called upon to decide; and your decision on this topic may be made this very day. For you have evidence to enable you to arrive at a proper conclusion. You have seen those whose youth was innocent and virtuous, whose earthly prospects were

bright and promising, and whose hopes of prosperity and happiness were strong and ardent. They never determined to be either irreligious or immoral. They did not rush into vice and wretchedness. But they never decided to be practical christians; and at this door the destroyer entered. One slight indulgence led to another more aggravated. One short step in the path of dissipation paved the way for a longer. At length habits of excess began to form and strengthen, until the victim had lost all regard to character. Their ruined prospects were the natural consequence of their want of decision. On the other hand, you may notice those who do honor to their nature and their profession. They early resolved to obey the captain of their salvation. They persevered against all temptations and obstacles, until the straight and narrow path of duty became plain and pleasant. They are now reaping the rewards of their honest exertions, in the approbation of their own hearts, in their respectability and usefulness, and in the promised blessing of heaven. Both classes you have observed. And now which will you imitate? Will you neglect to choose the paths of religion until too late? Until you have wandered too far in the labyrinths of iniquity ever to return to the regions of innocence and peace? Or will you secure the good part which can never be taken from you, in any period of trial or persecution or affliction? I entreat you to make your decision on this momentous inquiry. I wish you to decide honestly and impartially. Count well the

cost of the undertaking. Look at the advantages and disadvantages. Observe that an irreligious life, is ever attended with uneasiness and anxiety, is unprepared for trials and afflictions, is unqualified for pure and rational happiness, may soon degenerate into open immorality, may terminate in a wretched death, and may lead to regions of unutterable disappointment and sorrow. Observe on the other hand that a christian course ensures the approbation of conscience, gives inward peace and security, furnishes a defence against temptation and anxiety, secures rational and elevated enjoyment, prepares for a cheerful submission to the divine will, qualifies for a joyful death and a blissful immortality. At first you may find it easiest to remain thoughtless and unconcerned; to pass along the flowing current of time inactive, and to maintain just enough of virtue to secure a respectable place in society. But the path of holiness, although it may present some difficulties to those who have evil habits to overcome, undisciplined passions to conquer, uneasy propensities to restrain, unprincipled associates to shake off, will soon grow smoother and brighter and pleasanter, as you increase in knowledge and goodness. Choose you then this day whom you will serve. If you choose Jesus for your master, as I trust most of you will, you will immediately proceed to the execution of your resolution.

2. Practice then is the second requisition. You have decided to be obedient christians. You will immediately commence the prescribed labor. And

what is to be done? Why, you are to aim to do right at all times and in all your relations. You are to avoid the wrong in all things and under all circumstances. You can do but one deed in one instant. Almost every moment you will be tempted either to neglect the right or pursue the wrong. Resist the temptation, and your work is well begun, and will lead to a happy termination. When therefore you retire from this place, let self-examination occupy your attention. Carefully compare yourselves, your thoughts, motives, feelings, dispositions, conversation and conduct, with the christian standard. Your relation to your heavenly Father requires you to render supreme love, spiritual and sincere devotion, habitual gratitude, cheerful resignation, unwavering confidence and unreserved obedience. In how many of these duties are you deficient? How many do you perform in a thoughtless manner? And how many do you engage in from unworthy motives? Your relation to Christ Jesus requires you to study his instructions, believe his teachings, imitate his example, exhibit his heavenly spirit and submit to his authority. In how many of these virtues are you deficient? How many have you entirely omitted or greatly slighted? And how many have you performed from unchristian impulses or in an unchristian manner? Your relation to your fellow men requires you to love them as your brethren, and ever to do unto them as you would have them do unto you. And this golden rule extends to your very principles of action, your daily

and hourly intercourse, your whole connexion in every particular. In how many instances have you violated this law of love, either by injuring the feelings, influence or property of your neighbors; or by misrepresenting their motives, words, or actions? Your relation to your own soul requires you to be temperate in all things, meek and humble in your dispositions; and to practice unwearied self-discipline and self-cultivation. In how many of these requisites have you failed, and in how many succeeded? By thus examining your hearts and characters, and comparing yourselves with your great examplar, you will learn your deficiences and iniquities.

Having faithfully accomplished this primary step in the path of holiness, you will be fully prepared to proceed with your work of reformation and improvement. You must not be alarmed at the magnitude of the undertaking; for you are expected to do but one deed at one time. You must not look forward to the great obstacles to your progress, and thus become weary in well doing. No. Your whole attention must be directed to the present instant. Are you performing the duties and cherishing the dispositions incumbent on you this instant? This is to be the everlasting question. You are to watch the passing second to see that you indulge in no sinful thoughts, feelings, affections, conversation, conduct; to ascertain if your motives, meditations, dispositions and habits are christian. Let this be done now, and the *next instant*, and so on, from morning's light

to evening's shade, and you will be living a religious life. Your work of salvation from ignorance, error and sin will be constantly going forward. At one time you will detect an imperfection in your doctrinal opinions, which will be readily surrendered to the force of truth. At another you will discover some new article of belief, which will be willingly incorporated into your principles of faith. At one time you will notice a neglect in your secret devotions and adopt measures to prevent a second deviation. At another you will banish an improper train of thought and supply its place with worthy subjects of speculation. At one time the words of unkindness and scandal may fall from your lips. The recollection of your own imperfections will check the growth of the evil and increase your feelings of benevolence. At another your peace may be disturbed by peevishness, ill nature or resentment. Such propensities you will overcome by the cultivation of patience, meekness and humility. And in this mode you will proceed from day to day and from year to year, correcting one failing and then another, acquiring one virtue and then another, according to the apostolic direction, until you have formed and perfected a christian character. Your increase in goodness will thus be certain. The world may observe no immediate change in your behavior; for the progress of religious reformation is internal, silent, slow, unostentatious. But you will yourselves be sensible of important changes. You will be constantly aiming at one object, the practice of goodness.

New duties will therefore be performed; new motives and principles will be brought into operation; new joys will be experienced; erroneous views will be discarded; evil dispositions will be banished; sinful habits will be abandoned, and wicked practices forsaken. In all this there will be nothing sudden, nothing mysterious, nothing miraculous, nothing but the natural fruit of your wise decision and your christian perseverance, aided by the promised assistance of your Father in heaven.

3. Profession is the third requisition. When you have practised self-correction and self-cultivation sufficiently long to test the sincerity of your decision, you will find pleasure and advantage in professing openly your faith in Jesus. He is your acknowledged master. He has requested his sincere followers to remember him in a positive ordinance. This seems to be one of the most common ways of confessing your allegiance; and this is one important means of personal improvement. You will obtain peace of mind from this compliance, resulting from a consciousness of obedience to the last request of your dying Saviour. You will also obtain increased security against the allurements and temptations of a sinful world. You will likewise naturally associate with those who will give you valuable advice, needed assistance, christian sympathy and encouragement. And knowing that some may be watching for your halting, you will make more strenuous exertions to avoid the very appearance of evil. But your greatest satisfaction will arise from an attend-

ance upon the supper itself. For there, if faithful to yourselves, you will experience new and elevating feelings, sacred and aspiring thoughts, and the purest affections, and the best resolutions. And a temper, a spirit, will be cherished, which will yield you the peaceable fruits of righteousness. You thus perceive that in making choice of practical religion, three things are requisite. You must first decide, whether you will receive Jesus as your only master in matters of religion, or whether you will serve the corrupt maxims of the world. If you choose the gospel for your standard of faith and practice, you will in the second place endeavor to comply with its requisitions. And having ascertained your sincerity, you will not hesitate to confess your Lord before men, and thus fulfil all righteousness. Let me then put the question to your conscience. Will you not resolve to become practical christians? You are urged to this course by the most weighty and affecting considerations. I have time to mention but three particulars.

1. You are urged to become practical christians by your obligations to your heavenly Father. Consider your peculiar blessings. Instead of assigning your rank among the fowls of the air or the beasts of the field, he has created you but a little lower than the angels; endowed you with reason and understanding and conscience, and made you capable of acquiring knowledge and wisdom and holiness. Instead of giving you birth in an age of darkness or in a land of ignorance, he has called you into being in this

enlightened period of the world, and in this favored region of good learning, civil liberty and religious freedom. Instead of leaving you to the dim light of unaided reason and uninformed conscience to learn your duty, destination and happiness, he has sent his well beloved son to dispel the clouds of superstition and error, to make the path of virtue plain before you, to support you under the changes and trials of this mortal pilgrimage, and to open to you the door of immortal felicity. Instead of permitting the summons of death to sound in your hearing, he has preserved you amidst dangers seen and unseen, in times of sickness and destruction, and given you all needed mercies richly to enjoy. In short, every blessing, personal, domestic, religious, social, literary and civil which you have received and enjoyed, has been graciously bestowed upon you by your ever-present and unchangeable Father. And what have been your returns for such unmerited favors? Look back on your past lives. Do they furnish any claims to such distinctions? Have they not been marked by forgetfulness, ingratitude, disobedience? Are you not then called upon by every generous principle of your heart, by every obligation which can influence a rational being, to reform your characters, to love this friend who has always blessed you in all temporal and spiritual blessings, to obey this governor who has given you laws for your own improvement and happiness. Will you not then be influenced by these considerations to live as he designed, to live as he requires, to live to his glory, *to live a sober*, righteous and godly life?

2. You are urged to become practical christians by your unconquerable desire for happiness. You were indeed created for its gratification. This can be secured only by living as the gospel requires. Perhaps however some of you are expecting to satisfy this craving of the soul with some mere earthly advantage; with worldly pleasures or honors or riches or distinctions. If so your expectations will assuredly be disappointed. For the longings of your spiritual, immortal mind can never be satisfied with material, sensual, temporal gifts. Go to the man of dissipation; ask if his excessive indulgences yield him unalloyed happiness; if he speaks the truth, he will acknowledge that they cause almost unmingled wretchedness. Go to the miser; ask if his hoarded treasures afford him pure satisfaction; if he speaks the truth, he will admit that they are vanity and vexation of spirit. Go to the slave of ambition; ask if his honors and emoluments secure him constant and rational enjoyment; if he speaks the truth, he will confess that they are empty bubbles. Propose the same enquiry to all who seek for happiness in merely worldly gratifications, and you must receive similar answers. No; nothing but christian principles, dispositions, habits and hopes can cause you to rejoice at all times and under all circumstances. If you cherish and possess and exhibit these, you will live up to the dignity of your noble nature. You will ever feel yourselves in the presence and keeping of a *perfect* and unchangable Father. You will regard

all the events of the world which are above human control as under the direction of infinite wisdom and paternal love. You will ever regard your risen Saviour as the pledge of your own immortality. Your appetites and passions will be subject to the voice of reason and revelation. Your bosom will be filled with animating prospects of future glory. You will secure at all times the approbation of your conscience. Your moral goodness will claim the respect and esteem of all worthy minds. You will be prepared for the trials and afflictions of mortality. Your happiness being founded on your christian character will not depend on your outward circumstances, but will be increased by every new accession of temporal good. Be practical christians then and you will assuredly secure the true enjoyment of this life, and a preparation for heavenly felicity. This I declare unto you upon the authority of all the unprincipled and wicked; for their hearts uniformly testify, that the ways of transgressors are hard and wretched. This I say upon the authority of all the righteous; for they unitedly declare that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness and peace. This I affirm upon the testimony of your own consciences; for they already reproach you for neglecting and disregarding the gospel requisitions. This I aver upon the testimony of Jesus; for he commanded you to seek first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. This I repeat upon the injunction of your heavenly Father; for he has called upon you to remember your Creator in the

days of your youth. And can you withstand all this authority; the united testimony of earth and heaven? Will you turn a deaf ear to the warning and inviting and encouraging voice of reason and conscience, of experience and observation, of the wise and holy, of Jesus and God? Will you not seek happiness in the only path in which it can be found, in loving your Father and your fellow men, in preserving yourselves pure, and cultivating your immortal nature?

3. You are urged to become practical christians by your obligations to your Saviour. Consider what he has done and suffered for your salvation. From his instructions you first learn that God is really and truly your Father and the common Parent of the human family; that he is ever present to uphold and protect and bless you; that he never afflicts you in anger, or wrath, or resentment, but in infinite wisdom and love, and solely for the best good of all concerned; that he is constantly showering upon you temporal and spiritual blessings, and that he will never desert the offspring of his affection, but forever remain their unchangeable friend. From his revelations and resurrection you are assured of another life and a happy reunion with all the ransomed of the Lord. Consider too how much it cost him to proclaim these glad tidings and confirm their truth with satisfactory evidence. You behold him in poverty, destitute of the necessaries of life, and having not even a place for quiet sleep. You behold him calumniated and persecuted by the envious jews and bigoted phari-

sees. You witness his agony in the ever memorable garden, overwhelmed with such intense mental suffering as to cause his blood to burst from the very pores of his mortal body. You behold him in the council chamber of Pilate, falsely accused, unjustly condemned, cruelly insulted, inhumanly scourged, barbarously mocked. You behold him nailed to the accursed cross, in distress calling upon his God, his tortures malignantly derided by the degraded priests, his precious side pierced with a spear, and his humble piety commending his departing spirit into the hands of his ever-present Father. When you read the tale of fictitious woe, your hearts are melted in compassion, and your eyes are suffused with tears of sorrow. And have you no sympathy with the sufferings of Jesus, the unparalleled sufferings of a crucified Saviour, endured to rescue you from ignorance and error and sin and death? And when you listen to the tale of heroic deeds, the tear of generous approbation moistens your cheeks. And have you no approving tears for the heroic, the godlike sacrifices of Jesus? for him who could cheerfully do and suffer so much for the benefit of an ungrateful world? for him who could forgive his brutal murderers, and while enduring the excruciating pains of an ignominious death, could even sincerely pray, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do? O yes. The youthful heart was not made to throb at the relation of imaginary trials merely. You can feel more deeply for the scenes of reality and sublimity. And what does this disinterested Saviour

require of you? Nothing for his own advantage; nothing for the benefit of his Father; no, but everything for your own happiness. He wishes you to be practical christians, so that you may conform to the unchangeable laws of your nature; so that you may obey the everlasting dictates of cultivated reason; so that you may yield to the directions of enlightened conscience; so that you may render obedience to the divine commands of your merciful Parent; so that you may live useful, respectable and happy lives; so that you may be prepared to meet calmly and cheerfully all the troubles of this mortal pilgrimage; so that you can rejoice in the approach of death, and enter gloriously upon the felicities of heaven. O let these considerations induce you to make choice of practical religion, to receive the gospel of Jesus for your standard of faith and practice, to study his teachings with prayerful attention, to imitate his example with scrupulous care, to imbibe largely of his heavenly spirit. Yes, make this wise choice; a choice which you will never repent, a choice which will ever secure your approbation, a choice which will insure your present and everlasting happiness.

And choose this day. Say not that a more convenient season will arrive. Tomorrow may bring its cares and anxieties and engagements. Your affections may become more deeply engrossed in worldly pursuits. Your serious impressions may be gradually effaced. Your good resolutions may grow weaker and weaker until wholly dissipated. And when too late to admit a remedy, you may dis-

cover that life has afforded you little or no satisfaction; that you have few or no resources of enjoyment in your own bosoms; that you are destined to wear out a miserable old age with fruitless wishes, and that you must enter the portal of eternity without the cheering and supporting light of gospel hope. I do not affirm that this will be your condition. But I do assert that it has been the case of thousands who have deferred attention to religion to some more convenient season. And it may be your fate; for now is the most accepted time, and now is your best day for salvation.

Choose this day. Say not that you have sufficient security for your virtue. Tomorrow may spread before you its beguiling temptations. Your innocence may be overcome. Your integrity may be conquered. The restraints of principle once wilfully broken, and the flood gates of depravity will be thrown open. A second sinful step may be taken, and so on; and at each step you may plunge deeper and deeper in iniquity, and sink lower and lower in degradation, until all hope of reformation is lost. I do not aver that this will be your condition. But I do affirm that it has been the case of thousands who have renounced the councils of religion, and trusted to their own unaided strength for safety. And it may be your fate; for you are now entreated to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

Yes, choose this day. Say not that a long life is before you. Tomorrow the insiduous disease

may attack your constitution. All medical aid may prove ineffectual. Your strength may decay. Your flesh may waste. Your spirits may sink. And in a few weeks or months you may be called to part with all things below. And in the hour of separation, you will wish but too vainly wish, that you had followed the instructions of Jesus. I do not declare that this will be your condition. But I do aver that it has been the case of thousands who have trusted to their youth and health for length of days, and put far away the period of sickness and dissolution. And it may be your fate; for now you are favored with every advantage and means for spiritual improvement. And I do also affirm, that whenever you shall be called from this world, whether sooner or later, if you have chosen the good part of religion, you will depart in peace to regions of never ending blessedness. But if you should neglect this affectionate entreaty, and be removed to eternity while destitute of the spirit and hopes of the gospel, you may look back to this day as the period of the last strivings of your Father's spirit. But should you now choose to become practical christians, and commence effectually the work of reformation and improvement and salvation, you will ever rejoice in the return of this as the anniversary of your happiness both for time and eternity. Choose you then this day whom you will serve.

SERMON XXI.

NATURE AND NECESSITY OF HOLINESS.

HEBREWS XII. 14. AND HOLINESS WITHOUT WHICH NO MAN SHALL SEE THE LORD.

YOUR attention is requested to some remarks on the nature and necessity of holiness.

I. What then is holiness?

1. Holiness is christian goodness. A holy character is a christian character. In order then to acquire holiness you must receive the christian scriptures as the guide of your religious belief and moral conduct. You must study them with fidelity, and whatever doctrines they reveal you must firmly believe; whatever duties they enjoin you will perseveringly perform, although it should require great and constant exertions. So also whatever sins they condemn you must forsake and avoid, although this should cost you much self-denial and many painful sacrifices. As each one of you is answerable to God alone for your faith and practice, so must each one of you determine for himself, what doctrines are

revealed, what duties are required, what sins are forbidden. And you must examine the sacred writings so regularly, and cultivate a christian spirit so faithfully, and perform your duties so constantly, and avoid sin so vigilantly, that the result may be habits; habits of serious thinking and feeling which may manifest themselves in outward conversation and conduct. Habits like these must constitute your character, and must be formed by voluntary, unremitting, prayerful exertions, aided by the promised influences of the divine spirit. If you are truly engaged, and strictly faithful to yourselves, your character will be christian, belong to what denomination you may, because you have formed it according to your honest understanding of the teachings and requisitions of the christian religion. And because christian, it must be a holy character; for holiness is nothing more nor less than christian goodness.

2. But if holiness is acquired, perhaps you will ask, if there is a period in the life of every christian when its acquisition commenced? Strictly speaking there must be such a time, although it is generally unknown to the person himself. This period is different with different individuals. Some commence a christian life, the formation of a christian character, in the very morning of their days; others in youth; others in middle age; and others in advanced years. The causes which lead to this beginning are also various; almost as various as the *individuals* affected by their influence. Those who

begun at a very early age, who cannot remember the time when they did not conscientiously love their heavenly Father and scrupulously endeavor to obey his laws, are doubtless indebted to the early, judicious, successful instructions of pious parents and friends. And though for a time their knowledge of God and Christ and duty were very imperfect, yet they acted up to the light they enjoyed, and thus really commenced the formation of holy characters. But you might as reasonably require them to specify the time when they began to love their earthly parents, as the period when they began to love their heavenly Father. Others who have passed a few or perhaps many years in a careless, thoughtless manner as regards religion, are led to reform their characters, to begin the practice of neglected duties, and the correction of unholy affections and sinful practices, by the perusal of the scriptures, the instructions of the sabbath, the goodness of providence, serious reflection and self-examination. Others again are roused from their spiritual slumbers by extraordinary means; such as the loss of friends, recovery from sickness, a remarkable preservation, a striking providence, a powerful excitement of mind. There are still others of all ages who have never begun in earnest the great work of reformation and improvement, and who pay no special regard to the christian invitations and instructions.

3. Not only so. There are different degrees of goodness and wickedness, both among those who are

endeavoring to live christian lives and those who pay no particular attention to the gospel. For in this world no one can be so good as not to have something bad attached to him; if he could he would be a very angel; for an angel can be nothing more than wholly good. Neither can any one be so bad as not to have something good attached to him; if he could he would be a very devil; for a devil can be nothing more than wholly bad, totally depraved. Every character is therefore mixed as you must have learnt from experience and observation as well as from revelation. But those are considered holy in the scriptures who sincerely endeavor to regulate their hearts and lives by the christian standard, although still guilty of many transgressions. Those are accounted wicked who pay no proper attention to the divine laws, and the performance of their incumbent duties, although possessed of some good qualities. And the time when a person begins a religious life is when he begins to act from christian motives and principles. To some this time is known; to others equally good it is unknown. Some have many experiences to relate; others equally pious are unwilling to relate any. There are divers operations but all of the same spirit. It is therefore of little or no consequence to any one, whether this time be known or unknown, or by what means he was first excited to reform his heart and life, provided he is careful in avoiding all that he knows to be wrong, and faithful in performing all that he knows to be right.

Neither is it proper to fix upon any age as the most proper season for beginning a christian life. The whole of life is given to prepare for heaven. This preparation consists in the formation of a holy or christian character. And as the future happiness of any individual will be proportioned to his degrees of moral goodness, he is urged by every consideration of hope and fear, of interest, gratitude and love, to begin to live a sober, righteous and godly life instantly and in earnest, let his age be what it may.

4. But if your happiness is to depend on your christian goodness, perhaps you will ask, how salvation can properly be called a free gift? If it can be received by none but the good, and if holiness is to be acquired by one's own exertions, how is it to be considered free? I answer, that salvation is still a free gift on the part of God. Let me illustrate. Your temporal blessings are his free gifts. From him you receive life, support, friends; all civil, social, domestic blessings. You do not however receive them without continual exertions on your part. But they are not less the free gifts on that account. For he receives nothing from you in return nor ever can; because he is a perfect being, the perfect creator of all things. And the love and worship and obedience you render to your heavenly Father redound to your own benefit, increase your own enjoyment, and not the felicity of a perfectly happy being. So too the salvation of your souls from sin is his free gift, not only in this way but in a more peculiar sense. For it was he

who sent Jesus into the world to save men from ignorance, error, superstition, depravity and death; and he did all that was necessary for this purpose. He exhibited the paternal character of your maker, and his benevolent designs respecting his human children. He left for our instruction and consolation the blessed gospel, and for our imitation a spotless example. He died to seal the truth of his declarations, and was raised from the dead to assure us of the certainty of our immortality. All this has your Father caused to be done for the salvation of men, without our having done anything to merit such favors; without our having it in our power to make any return whatever. Is not salvation then a free gift on the part of God although you cannot secure it without holiness? Suppose an earthly parent leaves to an only son his whole estate, on condition that the son will give a certain portion to a friend. If the son complies with the condition he receives the legacy; if not he forfeits the gift. Now whether the son complies or not, is not the legacy a free gift on the part of the father? Precisely so with your salvation. God offers it to you on condition of your becoming holy; with which condition you have full power to comply. Now whether you comply or not, is not salvation a free gift on the part of God? Most assuredly. Nothing can be plainer. If you accept the condition, all you can do, all you are required to do, is to qualify yourself for the enjoyment of a free, unpurchased gift. Consequently there is no inconsisten-

cy in calling salvation a free gift, although you receive it only when by your exertions you become holy.

II. But why cannot salvation be attained without the possession of christian goodness?

1. Because the nature of the soul is such that it must be holy before it can possibly be happy. All your knowledge of the human soul must be derived from its operations and from revelation. From experience you learn that there is a principle within you which thinks, reasons, judges, remembers, imagines. This is called the mind or soul. You also learn that this spiritual being can be expanded by discipline and cultivation; can make unlimited acquisitions in knowledge; can from habits of thinking and feeling and acting; can enjoy exquisite happiness or suffer the keenest misery. You likewise learn that its present happiness or misery depends in a very great degree on its moral state; on its purity or pollution; on its goodness or wickedness. For you well know that if you cherish proper motives, virtuous thoughts, amiable dispositions, benevolent feelings, pious affections, you are happy. These are joyful and agreeable states of the soul. Your happiness results from their being holy states; for holiness is happiness. On the contrary you also well know that if you cherish unhallowed motives, evil and sensual thoughts, sinful desires, and unholy affections, you are miserable. These are tormenting states of your soul. Your misery results from their being wicked states; for wicked-

ness is wretchedness. You thus perceive that the soul was made for goodness, and consequently it must be holy before it can be happy even in this world, for this is required by its very nature.

Now the gospel assures us that the soul shall never die, that it is immortal. And there is good reason to believe that it enters the next stage of existence as it leaves this, with all its habits of thought and feeling and affection as here formed, with all its moral character as here decided. For if the mind when it enters the spiritual world loses its remembrance of a former state, it is not the same soul; it is not immortal; and this earthly scene has no connexion whatever with another life. But this is absurd, and plainly contradicted by reason and revelation. It appears to me morally certain that on beginning another existence, the soul will be the same, will preserve its consciousness, will maintain its identity, will bear precisely the same character, as when it leaves this world. If so, and if its happiness here depends almost wholly on its moral goodness, then its happiness must depend on the same cause there. Holiness must produce happiness, and iniquity misery. For your Father being unchangeable will remain unchanged; the principles of his moral government being eternal will remain unaltered; the human soul being immortal will retain the same nature, and the same capacity for suffering and enjoyment; and the distinction between sin and holiness, misery and happiness, will be lasting as *eternity*. Consequently the nature of the soul is *such* that it must be holy before it can be happy.

2. Not only so. The nature of heavenly happiness is such that it cannot be enjoyed without holiness. You are assured that heaven is a state of purity and excellence. It is the abode of the spirits of just men made perfect, of an innumerable company of angels, of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and of God the judge and father of all. Now to enjoy such society, to be happy with such beings, you must be in some degree like them. You must have similar dispositions and desires. You must be qualified for their employments and pleasures. And if you live a life of active goodness, you will resemble them in some humble degree, and you will have the most ardent desires to become still more perfect. But if you pay no sincere regard to goodness, and cultivate no love for your heavenly Father here, how can you find happiness in practising goodness and loving your Father at your entrance into a future existence? How can a wicked person enjoy pure and spiritual society? If you love yourselves and earthly objects supremely until your very entrance into eternity, can you then immediately transfer your affections to your Saviour and your God? Can you then immediately change all your habits of thought, feeling and action, and bring yourself to delight at once in the purity and holy occupations of heaven? Or can you with selfish desires, earthly propensities, undisciplined passions, and evil habits, be a proper companion for those justified spirits who love their Maker supremely, and their associated fellows as

themselves? O No. Before you can be happy in the society of pure and holy spirits you must be pure and holy. For the nature of heavenly happiness is such that it cannot be enjoyed without holiness.

3. But this is not all. The foregoing arguments are fully confirmed by the general scope and object of the christian scriptures. I think the most careless perusal must convince you that all things there recorded; all the truths and doctrines there revealed; all the entreaties, exhortations, warnings, promises there given; all the instructions, labors, and sufferings of Jesus and his apostles there mentioned, were designed to affect one great purpose; that of turning mankind from ignorance, error and wickedness to knowledge, truth and goodness. And all this is intended, not certainly for the benefit of God, for he is a perfect being, and cannot be benefited by his creatures, but for the benefit of his rational children; because ignorance, error, sin and depravity make them miserable, punish them; while knowledge, truth, virtue, piety and holiness make them happy, reward them.

You are assured that God is no respecter of persons, but will render unto every man according to his deeds. Now is this the case in the present life? Is there an equal distribution of the means of improvement and happiness? This no one will pretend. Then there is not an equal distribution of rewards and punishments; for christian rewards consist in knowledge and goodness, and these can

not be acquired without the necessary means. If then there is justice in God, if he is an impartial parent of all his children, he will surely rectify these inequalities in a future existence, where sin will receive its full and just punishment, and holiness its full and just reward. I think this impression must be left on the mind of every candid reader of the gospel. It is therefore unnecessary to quote particular passages to confirm this statement. It is sufficient to mention the plain, explicit, solemn declaration of Jesus to this effect, which no ingenuity has yet been able to pervert from its true and obvious meaning. The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation. For without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

Perhaps you will now ask, if future misery is consistent with the known benevolence of God? Perhaps you will argue in these terms; God is perfectly benevolent; he wills the happiness of all his children; he is a perfect sovereign; his will must therefore be accomplished, and all his rational offspring saved from any future punishment. Now this is not correct reasoning. Your conclusion is not legitimately drawn from your premises. That God is perfectly benevolent I grant; for he is infinite love. That he wills the salvation or happiness of all his children I also grant; for his perfections do not permit him to will anything but ultimate felicity.

That all his offspring are either happy here or will be so at their entrance into eternity I do not grant, and for the following brief reasons. He wills your temporal happiness as much and in the same manner as he wills your future happiness. Yet you are not all happy in this world. There are many whom sin renders miserable. They are not sinful and consequently miserable because God has so willed or so made them, but because they have made themselves so, because they have disobeyed the laws he gave and commanded them to observe on penalty of the experienced punishment, because they have abused their moral freedom, and followed their own perverse wills to the neglect of the divine will. You thus perceive that even their temporal happiness does not depend wholly on the will of their Father. They have wills of their own which are free, free to choose and act, and if they do not will, do not choose, to be holy and consequently happy, God does not compel them to be holy and happy. But did happiness depend wholly on the divine will, were we mere machines to be moved only at his will, then I grant that we should be continually happy; for a being of love could will nothing but happiness. But your own experience and observation teach you differently. I feel that I am a free agent. I am conscious that my present happiness depends principally on myself; on my willing to be either righteous or wicked, and conforming to the decisions of my own will. And I see no reason whatever to believe that my will, which is nothing

but a particular state of my mind, is to experience any special change by the dissolution of my body. Even if it should, my sinful habits would still remain to torment me; the remembrance of my past ingratitude and sinfulness would produce punishment. But if my character remains unaffected by death, and my soul enters the other world as many leave this, impenitent, unreformed, unholy, what is to give me happiness? What is to save me from the natural consequences of my wickedness? Must I not suffer so long as I remain polluted? But perhaps you will assert that he who is dead is freed from sin. How so? What is the meaning of the apostle in this declaration? Look at the connexion and you will be easily convinced. He that is dead *to sin* is freed from sin, the power, the punishment, the hell of sin. Now this is precisely the doctrine I am advocating. When therefore the scriptures speak of God as willing the salvation of all men, you will carefully notice that he first wills they should come to a knowledge of the truth, to repentance, to reformation, to holiness; and whenever they do sincerely believe and obey the gospel they are saved, and not until then. It would be as much of a miracle for God to make a wicked person happy in his sins, either in this world or the next, as to raise the dead or create a universe. So long therefore as misery either here or hereafter is the fruit of your own choosing, it can present no objection to the perfect benevolence of God.

5. Perhaps you will finally ask, how those who

die in infancy and childhood can be happy in a future existence, since they were not born holy and have not lived long enough to acquire holiness? This question I will candidly answer. An infant, though not a moral agent and of course without any moral character, is still a subject of the kingdom of heaven, as expressly affirmed by the Saviour. He is innocent, for he has committed no sin. He is pure, for his soul being spiritual must proceed directly from the Father of spirits, from whom no impure thing can proceed. And because he is innocent and pure, just as he came from the hands of his Maker, he is an object of divine complacency and love; and at death he is conveyed to mansions of eternal blessedness by those guardian angels who do always behold the face of their Father in heaven. There he can suffer nothing; for his soul is free from sin, the only cause of suffering in a spiritual world. Nor can he ever suffer; for he has no evil in himself, and no temptations around him; he sees none but good examples to imitate, and hears only the language of truth and piety; he receives none but holy instructions, and associates with none but pure beings; of course he will commit no sin, and consequently can suffer no punishment. Though he suffers nothing nor ever can, neither can he enter immediately upon perfect spiritual happiness. For he enters the other world as ignorant as he leaves this; his existence is but just commenced; he has not acquired the full exercise of his faculties; he has formed no moral character; of course he is no

better prepared for perfect spiritual happiness than an infant in this world. But in this state he cannot long continue; for he has entered the kingdom of heaven; he is in the society of just men made perfect, who will delight in instructing him in the duties and enjoyments of the spiritual regions; he is received into the mansions of Jesus, who while on earth took little children into his arms and blessed them as the lambs of his fold; he is in the more immediate presence of God, who is love, and who loves all the works of his hands. Under such instructers, and with such examples, his progress in knowledge and holiness must be incalculable, and in exact proportion to his increase in these will be his increase in unalloyed happiness. Thus though destitute of personal holiness when borne by angels to paradise, he soon acquires a character altogether holy, and quickly becomes qualified for complete heavenly happiness? This speculation on the future condition of infants and children seems to me both rational and scriptural, and perfectly consistent with the necessity of holiness as a preparation for future happiness. I must therefore conclude, from considering the nature of the soul, the nature of heavenly happiness, and the general scope of the new testament, that christian goodness is absolutely essential to the soul's salvation, to its present and future happiness.

Thus, my friends, have I endeavored to show you the nature and necessity of holiness, and to answer such objections as might naturally be supposed to

arise in some of your minds. The truth of my statements and the correctness of my reasoning, I call upon each one of you to try by the test of your own experience, observation and bible. But for one I am fully persuaded that there are no substistutes for christian goodness. You may talk of the mercy of God, or the atonement of Christ, or the doctrine of election, or of a free unconditional salvation; but unless you maintain christian characters you cannot enjoy real happiness in this life; you cannot rationally and scripturally expect to enjoy the felicity of heaven. Be entreated then, as you value your temporal and eternal salvation, to follow after holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.

SERMON XXII.

2 PETER III. 18. GROW IN GRACE, AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

To whom is this exhortation applicable? To every individual present. For none of us have arrived at christian perfection. All of us have more or fewer imperfections and failings. We all neglect the performance of more or fewer incumbent duties; and the cultivation of more or fewer gospel virtues. Our characters are indeed various. Some of us have done more for ourselves than others. But our exemplar is yet a great distance before the best of his followers; and the time can never come, when we shall be so virtuous and pious that we can make no further progress in holiness. No. We are created for ever increasing and never ending improvement. It is therefore highly important that we should be exhorted to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But what does this exhortation require? It requires us all to be constantly increasing in knowledge and goodness; to be continually improving in every christian grace and affection; to be unceasingly and zealously striving to conform to the spotless example of our chosen master. Yes. We must cultivate our love to God. Our affection for him must daily increase. Its fruits must be more fully manifested in our submission to his holy will; in our gratitude for his unfailing blessings; in our confidence in his unchangeable friendship; and in our conformity to his moral image. We must also cultivate our love for our Saviour. Our affection for him should be more and more manifested, in our study of his character; in our imitation of his example; in our acquisition of his temper, and in our unreserved submission to his authority. We must likewise cultivate our love for our fellow men. Our benevolence towards them must be rendered more visible by our good works; by doing unto them as we would have them do unto us; and by doing all in our power for the promotion of their best welfare. We must finally cultivate true self-love; for this is the christian principle of action. And we must manifest its influence, by regarding things according to their real value; by taking into our estimate the whole of our existence; by regulating all our appetites and passions by the rules of reason and revelation, and making constant progress in the acquisition of knowledge, wisdom and goodness. This is what we must do in order to comply

with the apostolic injunction; in order to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But in what manner can we obey this injunction? By making a diligent and faithful use of the means of spiritual improvement; and by seeking the promised assistance of our Father's spirit. And what are some of these means of grace? The example of Jesus with which to compare our own character, so as to learn our deficiencies and transgressions; and the instructions of Jesus which teach us our duties, and furnish the motives to their performance. We have also, the devotions and instructions of the church; the writings of wise and experienced christians; social intercourse and private meditation and devotion, and the positive ordinances of our religion. All these are furnished to aid us in our onward progress in the christian life.

But how shall we employ these means of grace, so as to secure the desired improvement? Let a few examples illustrate. Suppose then you wish to increase in humility. You must first acquire a definite notion of the nature and fruits of this christian virtue. This can be done by a careful perusal of the gospel history. Look at the conduct of the chosen apostles. You see a display of the opposite vice. You find them aspiring to the highest honors of their master's supposed temporal kingdom, and frequently disputing among themselves who should be greatest. Our Saviour repeatedly reproved them for their pride and ambition, and in-

culcated the lesson of meekness and humility. He exhibited an example of these virtues in his own life and conversation. Having thus formed a correct idea of this peculiarly christian disposition, you must next seek for motives to its earnest cultivation. These may be readily discovered. For your own experience has doubltess taught you, that feelings of jealousy, pride, envy and self-righteousness, are ever attended with uneasiness and dissatisfaction; and on the contrary, that self-sacrifice, benevolence and humility always produce mental peace and approbation. Being convinced by such reflections that your interest and duty coincide, you will endeavor to repress all selfish, proud and haughty risings; and cultivate a lowly estimation of your own worth, by comparing your attainments in holiness with your advantages; with your obligations; with your Saviour's example. By such meditations and resolutions, by such exertions and endeavors, you will gradually wear away the habit of thinking of yourself more highly than you ought, and of acting in conformity with your humble opinion of your own improvement and deserts. The christian disposition of humility will thus take deep root in your heart, and bring forth fruit an hundred fold.

Not only so. Suppose I wish to have the love of God increased in my heart. I shall daily reflect on his existence as proved from the works of creation; and on his greatness as displayed in the firmament of heaven; and on his paternal character as revealed in the blessed gospel. I shall also con-

sider what he is to me, in giving me understanding from his own inspiration; in placing me in this favored land of christian institutions; in preserving my life and supplying my wants to the present time; in multiplying around me so many valuable blessings. By such meditations my love for his character must increase. For we are so made that we cannot help loving goodness whenever known and seen and felt. And thus I shall be rendered more devoted to the divine service; more resigned to the divine will, and more obedient to the divine laws. It is then only by ascertaining our deficiences, and learning the nature of the virtues to be acquired, and persevering in our good undertakings, that we can hope to make progress in the divine life.

But this is not all. The principal thing remains to be mentioned. The foundation of all improvement of character is this; an unconquerable desire for christian knowledge and piety. We must feel thoroughly convinced that we were created for holiness. We must realize that our highest, our only interest, is concerned in the formation and perfection of the christian character. A love for religious goodness should therefore become the ruling passion of our souls; that passion to which all others should surrender; that passion which should ever stimulate us to inquire how we may improve in moral excellence; that passion which should excite us to make every possible exerertion in the cause of self-improvement. If we cultivate and cherish this thirst for

gospel righteousness, we shall be daily and even hourly engaged in self-discipline and self-cultivation. And there is no other way, in which we can secure the promised influence of our Father's spirit; no other way in which we can make certain advancement in the christian course; no other way in which we can grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

III. But what is the need of all this self-scrutiny, and this comparison of ourselves with the example of our Saviour, and this reflection on the nature of the christian virtues, and this unceasing endeavor to grow in knowledge and goodness? What are the obstacles which oppose our progress? What are the discouragements which we shall encounter in the divine life?

1. Perhaps you regard the trials, and cares, and afflictions of life, as obstacles to spiritual improvement. But if you will attentively consider these things, you will find they do not present so formidable discouragements to a religious progress as you would at first imagine. You will remember that they are all wisely ordered by our heavenly Father. They are designed for our best ultimate good. We have the power of improving them to our benefit, or of misimproving them to our serious injury. And we must consider most of them as essential to our true enjoyment and superior excellence. Just notice a few examples. Were you not called to some mental or bodily labor, your health would materially suffer, and idleness would

prove a severe torment. Were you not required to have dealings with your fellow-men, you would enjoy no opportunities for establishing habits of honesty and veracity and charity. Were your wishes never disappointed, you would lose all facilities for acquiring the graces of patience and meekness and forbearance. Were you never bereaved of kindred and friends, you could not learn to exercise the virtues of sympathy and resignation. You thus perceive, that all your cares and trials and afflictions may be converted into the means of moral and spiritual improvement. Nay; unless they are rightly improved, they will prove curses to our happiness. For we may let our affections fasten so exclusively and tenaciously on the things of this world, as to neglect the grand concerns of our souls, and our obligations to our heavenly Father. We may let our daily cares render us impatient, fault finding, peevish. We may let our trials make us fretful, discontented, morose. We may let our afflictions render us repining, gloomy, melancholy. By realizing these dangers, and by knowing how to regard all these apparent obstacles, we shall constantly be on our guard. We shall assiduously endeavor to improve them to our best good. So that by making our labors increase our gratitude to God; by making our trials subservient to the formation of virtuous habits; by making our afflictions conducive to our progress in holiness, we shall overcome all these specious discouragements in the path of moral goodness, and convert them into

valuable means and opportunities for spiritual improvement.

2. Perhaps you may also regard your propensities and habits, as obstacles in your progress towards christian perfection. In this you are doubtless in the right. When we enter this world, we are all alike; all equally destitute of either sin or holiness; all equally pure and innocent. But while growing to years of maturity, various causes have operated to produce a difference in our views, feelings, habits, dispositions, characters. Our constitutional temperaments are different; so that we may encounter difficulty in overcoming our peculiar propensities; we may be so nervous, as to become easily irritated, discouraged, depressed; and consequently find difficulty in governing our feelings, tempers, passions. Or we may have so great a flow of spirits, as to find it difficult to restrain our mirth, and exhibit becoming sobriety and modesty. So also in our habits. We may early have become accustomed to profanity, falsehood or evil speaking; to covetousness, avarice, dishonesty; to a neglect of the worship, ordinances and institutions of religion. And thus experience great difficulty in breaking through long established and almost inveterate usages, and of acquiring long neglected moral graces and dispositions and virtues. Most of us have undoubtedly some peculiar propensity, or some pernicious habits; and these really present serious obstacles to our spiritual improvement. For you well know how much easier it is to follow in an old and beaten

track; to obey a long indulged appetite; to yield to a neglected passion; than it is to make a new way; to break off endeared customs; to root out sinful inclinations; to subdue rebellious and triumphant passions. For the latter course requires much thought, reflection, exertion; while the former may be trodden readily, easily, thoughtlessly. The only way then to overcome this class of discouragements, is by unremitting watchfulness and unwearied exertion. We must not accuse our nature as totally depraved, on account of the evils we have brought on ourselves. We must not expect miraculous aid to help us out of the miry pit into which we have deliberately and voluntarily plunged ourselves. We must endeavor to know our most easily besetting sins. We must realize that we have no defects in our characters, but such as we have ourselves acquired; and such too as we have power to avoid and forsake. We must feel that there are no virtues enjoined but such as have been exhibited in the human character, and such too as we may surely acquire. By thus understanding our enemies, we can conquer with certainty, if we will give constant and unremitting attention to the warfare.

3. Perhaps you may likewise regard the spiritual nature of our religion, and your slow progress in the divine life, as obstacles to your christian improvement. In this also you are surely in the right. For our moral goodness is made to consist in the proper state of the soul. If this be imbued with

holiness, the outward actions will be virtuous. When therefore you are exhorted to form the kingdom of heaven within you; to cherish pious affections; to acquire holy states of the soul, you experience some difficulty in knowing precisely what is meant; you find nothing very tangible in the directions. Were you ordered to offer sacrifices or prayers; to go on a pilgrimage or make a confession; to give sums of money or abstain from food and drink, you would readily understand the exhortation, and you would easily perform the required service. The case is far different in the cultivation of the christian dispositions. For there is no labor to which we are so averse as disciplining our own thoughts, feelings, passions, desires. In order to effect this labor, we must exercise the mind in the correction of itself. We must repress every vain thought, every inordinate desire, every rebellious passion, every unhallowed affection. We must also form habits of right thinking and feeling as well as acting. And because we can see no immediate results of our works, we must not be discouraged. The word *grow* is used by the apostle for the very purpose of teaching the progressive and gradual nature of spiritual improvement. Did you ever see a vegetable grow? You have seen many when grown. How foolish to complain, because you could not see the slow progress of the plant. It is the same in religion. The seed germinates and takes root in the heart; it spreads forth its branches in every direction; it comes to perfection through

much opposition; and when somewhat grown may be easily distinguished as the genuine plant of the gospel. It never springs up at once, and makes a sinner a saint in a moment. The path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

IV. Such then are some of the principal obstacles in the way of spiritual improvement. But you are not left to overcome these discouragements single handed. You are furnished with the most powerful motives to exertion, perseverance and prayer.

2. Yes, my friends, you are encouraged to grow in grace, by the certainty of success in your undertaking. For you were created for moral goodness, and your Creator has promised that all sincere exertions for its acquisition shall be crowned with a glorious victory. He is also ever ready to assist those who assist themselves; and none other need expect assistance. As well may you hope for a harvest where no seed has been sown and no cultivation rendered, as think to become good without great exertions to acquire moral goodness. But with constant and persevering endeavors, there can be no failure. Not so in any other concern. You may seek for riches, honors, distinctions, pleasures; and continue unsuccessful in all your efforts. But if you sincerely strive to do right in all things, and to avoid the wrong at all times, you cannot be ultimately disappointed. You will acquire a love for virtuous courses, and establish virtuous habits, and form a virtuous character. And how infinitely

more valuable a good christian character, than any earthly gift, or grace, or treasure, or emolument? Without this moral goodness, what are the things of this world worth to you; beauty, learning, wealth, flatteries, honors, or influence? Can these alone give you inward peace? The approbation of your own conscience? The respect of the wise and good? the necessary consolation for the hour of sickness, sorrow or death? or the essential qualification for the duties, joys and felicities of heaven? But with a good christian character, have you not everything essential to the true enjoyment of this life; everything which can qualify you for the pleasures, the trials, the afflictions of earth; and the rewards and glories of the heavenly kingdom? When therefore you consider the infinite superiority of moral goodness over every temporal acquisition; and when also you realize that all your well-directed efforts for an increase in christian knowledge and holiness shall be successful; will not this motive exert a powerful influence over your hearts and lives? Will it not stimulate you to strive most earnestly to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

2. But there is another motive still more efficient and moving. So sure as you increase your moral goodness, just so sure you will increase your rational happiness. Do you doubt the truth of this assertion? Try the experiment for yourselves. Set apart one week; the one on which we have now entered; and every time you feel unhappy, pause

and ascertain the cause of your misery. You will probably be surprised to learn that about nine tenths of your wretchedness might be wholly avoided, and the remaining tenth greatly diminished, if you were only as virtuous and as pious as you may become. For let us descend to a few particulars. At one moment, you suffer the follies or misconduct of those around you, to give you uneasiness and vexation. All this you might avoid by obtainining a proper command of your feelings. At another time, your disappointment produces peevishness and depression of spirits. All this you might also shun, by possessing cheerful resignation to the divine will. Soon you commit some sin, of thought, word, or deed, which is immediately followed by its natural painful consequence. This you would have escaped by abstaining from the transgression. Perhaps you may be afflicted by pain of body or mind. But if you have no compunctions of conscience; if you have a firm confidence in your ever present Father; if you regard such afflictions as blessings in disguise; your sufferings will be greatly diminished. your piety will raise you above such trials, and lead you to improve them to your own increase in happiness. And so in every instance that can be mentioned. You will uniformly find that true goodness will either alleviate or prevent your miseries. Will you then seek for happiness in every other course; toil and slave yourselves in a thousand different ways, and obtain nothing but vexation and disappointment? Will you not rather exhibit more

reasonableness; forsake and avoid all those practices which produce misery; and perform those duties which secure happiness? And will you not strive for that constant increase in moral goodness, which shall insure an unfailing increase of real enjoyment?

3. But finally, your obligation to your Father, for making your duty plain before you, and furnishing you with all necessary motives to its performance, should stimulate you to be constantly increasing in christian knowledge and goodness. He has sent his well beloved Son to be our Saviour. He has given us a revelation of his will. He has forbidden whatever would injure or destroy our enjoyment. He has commanded everything essential to our true happiness. He has furnished the sanctions of promises and threatenings, of rewards and punishments. And shall we render no gratitude for these distinguishing blessings? Yes; I call these distinguishing blessings. For what should we have been without the gospel? Learn of heathen nations. Look even to Greece and Rome in their best days. The state of morals was wretchedly low. Even the wisest among them had no motive to do as well as they knew how; to act up to their knowledge and convictions. For they had no correct ideas of the existence of one God. They never heard of an all perfect, ever present, universal Father. They understood not the heavenly nature of christian goodness. No future existence was made certain to their minds and hearts. And the righteous retributions of eternity gave no strength to their good resolutions. Oh

how highly blessed are we, in knowing there is one God who is truly our friend and Father; in having a perfect model of moral goodness in the example of our Saviour; and in the life and immortality brought to light in the gospel. Accordingly you find the best philosophers of antiquity despairing of ever seeing a reformation of public morals until some revelation should be made from heaven. Hear the observation of Socrates. 'You may give over all hopes of amending men's morals for the future, unless Deity be pleased to send some person to instruct you. Listen to the remark of Plato. 'Whatever is right and as it should be in this present state of the world, can be so only from the interposition of God.' What was the confession of Porphyry, an inveterate enemy to christianity? 'There is wanting some universal method of delivering men's souls from wickedness, which no sect of philosophy has ever yet discovered!' This universal method is now revealed. You have it in the christian religion. The proof is in your own hands. Take the New Testament for your guide of faith and practice; study its contents with care and attention; forsake and avoid everything there condemned; practise and pursue everything there required; bring home to your consciences the motives there declared; and in this method form such a character as the gospel commands. Do this, and you will have the testimony within yourself, evidence irresistible, that this system is perfectly adapted to your nature and necessities.

For your own experience will inform you, that misery follows disobedience, and happiness obedience. And shall we manifest no gratitude for such distinguishing favors? O yes; if we feel as children should feel towards an all-perfect Father; if we feel as penitent sinners should feel towards a disinterested and risen Saviour; if we feel as immortal beings should feel in view of an approaching and never-ending eternity, we shall manifest our gratitude, by obeying the gospel of eternal life.

Let us then, my friends, apply the subject of discourse to ourselves. Are we striving to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Are we laboring to increase in christian knowledge and goodness? Let the question be put to every conscience, and let a faithful inquiry be instituted, and an honest answer returned. If we are sincere followers of Jesus, we are diligently striving for greater moral perfection; and the fruits of our exertions are manifested in our dispositions, conversation and conduct. But if we are satisfied with our present attainments, we are probably growing worse; degenerating into irreligion and wickedness. Let us never forget that improvement, moral improvement, unremitting religious improvement, never-ending spiritual improvement is the command, the unalterable and eternal command of our ascended Saviour.

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